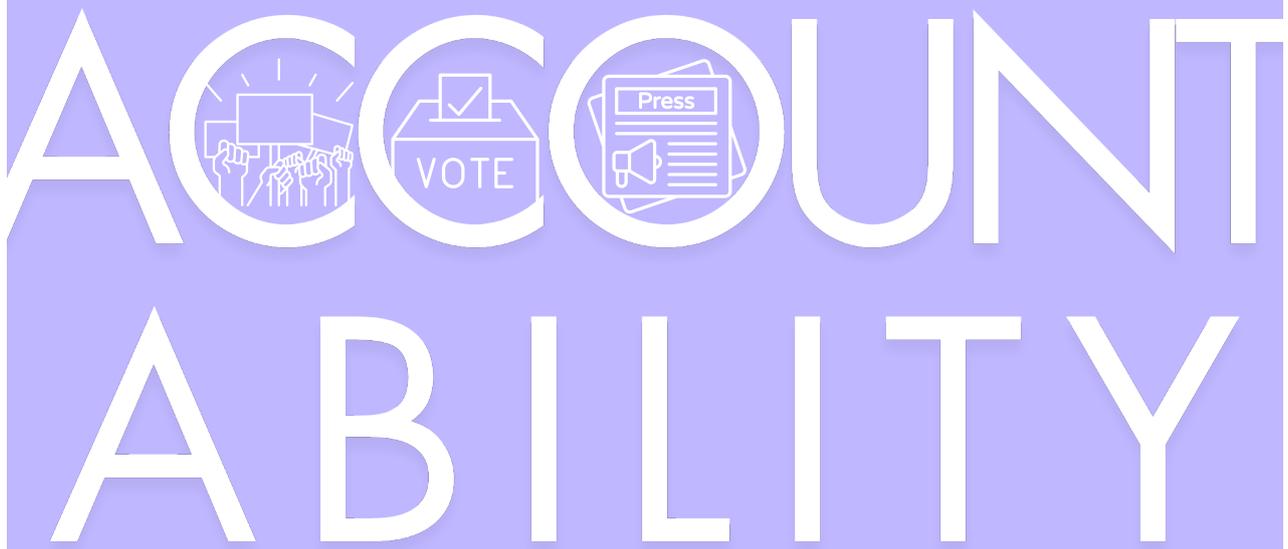


ACCOUNTABILITY



Vertical Accountability in Asia: Country Cases (II)

December 2024



In 2022, Asia Democracy Research Network (ADRN) selected horizontal accountability by the ability of state institutions to hold the executive branch accountable, and vertical accountability through elections, parties and citizens' participation, as the requirements to accomplish robust and sustainable democracy in Asia.

Against this background, ADRN published this report to evaluate the current state of the trends and trajectories of vertical accountability in the region by studying the phenomenon and its impact within countries in Asia, as well as their key reforms in the near future.

The report investigates contemporary questions such as:

- To what extent are elections free, fair, and inclusive, and multi-party in practice?
- To what extent are political parties unrestrained in their foundation and activity?
- How effective does the media provide diverse political perspectives?
- To what extent do citizens voluntarily engage in CSOs, operated without interference?
- To what extent are citizens free to express their views without fear of suppression?
- What should be done to improve the state of vertical accountability performance?

Drawing on a rich array of resources and data, this report offers country-specific analyses, highlights areas of improvement, and suggests policy recommendations to fulfill methods of vertical accountability in their own countries and the larger Asia region.

“Vertical Accountability in Asia: Country Cases (II)”

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Country Case 7: The Philippines

Vertical Accountability:

Reforming Representation in the Philippines

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1. Introduction

The Political landscape of the Philippines is dominated by the rich and the famous. This unfortunate situation is abetted by the underdeveloped character of political parties in the country. Political parties are important actors in a democratic system. They are expected to provide an organizational avenue for the aggregation of interests, the formulation of policy choices, the cultivation of leaders, and the engagement of citizens in electoral processes and the holding of governments to be accountable for their actions. For the longest time, they are the key organizations for political and democratic representation (Deschouwer 1996; Katz 2006; White 2006).

However, historical evidence indicates that Philippine political parties frequently prioritize the narrow objective of providing partisan vehicles for candidates seeking election rather than mobilizing the public in pursuit of coherent policy programs that would benefit the general population. Consequently, candidates are selected on their ability to command resources and their potential for success in an election, rather than on the strength of their commitment to specific policies, values, and principles (Hutchcroft 2020; Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2012).

The weak party system in the Philippines has contributed to the rise of populism and the erosion of the essential checks and balances that are vital for a vibrant democracy. Given the lack of effective disciplinary structures within political parties, politicians, including legislators typically align themselves with the party or parties of the winning presidential candidate. This facilitates the deterioration of legislative oversight and the advancement of executive aggrandizement.

Overall, analyzing the case of the Philippines as a defective democracy (Rivera 2016; Teehankee and Calimbahin 2020) that is more oligarchic than democratic, this paper elaborates on what Arugay (2005) described as an accountability deficit or the lack of accountability among government officials that has led to abuse and corruption. From a historical and structural perspective, this can be linked to the long-standing rule of oligarchs whose sense of accountability is based more on their relations with one another (e.g., inter-elite patronage) than their constituents (Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2012; Rivera 2016).

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If political parties and electoral systems are central to democratic governance, especially by serving as the primary conduits for citizen participation and government accountability, then questions about the effectiveness of these institutions in representing and responding to the electorate necessitate evaluation. It becomes a matter of fleshing out and substantiating political representation in terms of both supply (i.e., legal and political structures concerning elections and political parties) and demand (i.e., citizen-leader relations and the bottom-up demand for accountability) for vertical accountability.

From this viewpoint, vertical accountability becomes a question of values, expectations, and institutional arrangements that can facilitate the confrontation between the decision-making processes of citizen voters and policymakers (cf. Svobik 2013). Placed in electoral cycles, it ultimately becomes a matter of whether vertical accountability is pursued under virtuous (i.e., democratizing) or vicious (i.e., oligarchic) conditions.

Scholars have long mapped and tracked the idea of creating an environment where elections are considered avenues to obtain accountability from the elected. The concept of accountability has long been declared to be integral to democratic theory (Hellwig and Samuels, 2008). Vertical accountability, as a concept, is framed between political representation and democratic responsiveness, whereas Hellwig and Samuels (2008) echo that in many empirical studies, a system of incentives and disincentives is put in place by the electorate. Through this system, every vote functions as an executive decision to either reward or punish the incumbent accordingly, depending on economic conditions per term served by the elected.⁴

This paper examines the functionality of the electoral system and political parties in the Philippines in terms of representing voters, aggregating interests, crafting policies, cultivating leaders, and engaging citizens – substantiating a sense of responsibility among elected officials. Additionally, it investigates mechanisms beyond elections that allow the public to demand change and proposes reforms aimed at strengthening political parties and the electoral system to enhance accountability and voter representation.

This study addresses the following questions: Do elections and political parties function well to represent voters? How effective are political parties in aggregating interests, crafting policies, cultivating leaders, and engaging citizens to hold governments accountable through the electoral process? How can political parties be strengthened as institutions of representation in Philippine democracy? Can voters replace the government easily when it fails popular expectations? What are the existing institutional mechanisms that allow the public to demand change beyond elections? What kinds of political and electoral reforms are needed to promote voice and accountability?

The current study illustrates that *alongside limitations in the electoral and political party systems in the Philippines, there is a value system leaning more toward giving more license to leaders to act autonomously instead of holding them accountable as public servants*. This paper is organized accordingly to probe the different dimensions of vertical accountability. The first section provides an overview of the electoral and political party systems of the Philippines. The second section analyzes representation from a psycho-political perspective via citizen-leader relations. The third section conducts a general assessment of the supply and demand side of vertical accountability before opening areas for reform in the fifth section. The concluding section considers the avenues for the great dance between theory and practice relating to political representation in the Philippines and in comparison with its Southeast Asian neighbors.

⁴ They note that comparative research shows that accountability is appreciated differently across democratic systems. Being “imperfect tools,” the use of elections as a means of exercising the authority of the electorate over politicians is another point that must be underscored.

2. The Electoral and Political Party System of the Philippines

Regarding the supply side (structural-institutional) of vertical accountability, the Philippines faces the twin problems of a pluralistic electoral system and a weak party system. Both target the essence of majority rule in terms of quality and quantity. The pluralistic “first-past-the-post” electoral system of the Philippines places government leaders in a “winner-take-all” situation. This pluralist system, tied with patronage and turncoatism as the norms of the ruling elite, combines a weak popular mandate with super-majorities in the legislative branch, which can weaken the voice of criticism and opposition within the halls of government. Consequently, it also makes policymakers less accountable to the citizen-voter after elections and is especially true for those who end up as members of such patronage-driven super-majorities.

Adding to the limitations of the electoral system, a weak party system driven by entrenched structures of patronage and clientelism also characterizes Filipino politics (Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2012; Rivera 2016). In turn, this forms the core of what Teehankee and Calimbahin (2020) recognize as the defective democracy of Filipino politics, wherein regular elections merely serve as a means to legitimize members of an oligarchy and account for the anarchy of parties characterized by the proliferation of such organizations that are driven more by patron-client relations and money politics rather than party discipline and distinct political programs (Kasuya and Teehankee 2020). While there is a lack of incentives to maintain a strong chain of accountability between electors and the elected, there are more incentives facing elected officials to attach themselves to a patron.

A bridge between the authoritarian regime of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and the post-authoritarian period, the *Omnibus Election Code of the Philippines* serves as the primary legal framework underpinning elections in the Philippines since its ratification by the former, with the *Commission on Elections* (COMELEC) serving as the primary enforcer of the Omnibus Election Code. Though this study will not provide a comprehensive analysis of the Omnibus Election Code and COMELEC (see Caritos and Yadao 2024; Maambong 2001), it highlights the following points related to vertical accountability.

First, the Omnibus Election Code is supplemented by a series of legislations listed in Table 1 below. These have been formulated, in general, to improve the integrity and pursuit of the electoral process (e.g., laws concerned with automation and biometrics) and to facilitate a more inclusive system of representation and electoral participation positively through laws like the Party-List System Act of 1995, and negatively by reducing barriers to fair participation among candidates (e.g., Electoral Reforms Law of 1987, Fair Election Act of 2001). As Caritos and Yadao (2024, 229) state, these supplementary laws “involve the introduction of new electoral laws aimed at addressing issues, including the empowerment of vulnerable sectors, improvement of electoral competitiveness, regulations on campaign finance, and the integration of technology into the electoral process.”

Table 1. List of Related Electoral Laws

Number	Title
E.O. No. 157, s. 1987	Providing For Absentee Voting By Officers And Employees Of Government Who Are Away From The Place Of Their Registration By Reason Of Official Functions On Election Day
E.O. No. 292 (Book V, Title I, Subtitle C), s. 1987	The Constitutional Commissions: Commission on Elections
R.A. No. 6646	Electoral Reforms Law of 1987
R.A. No. 6735	Initiative and Referendum Act of 1989
R.A. No. 7160	Local Government Code of 1991
R.A. No. 7166	Synchronized Elections of 1991
R.A. No. 7941	Party-List System Act of 1995
R.A. No. 7787	An Act Instituting Electoral Reforms For The Purpose Of Amending Section 3, Paragraphs (C) And (D) Of Republic Act No. 7166 (1995)
R.A. No. 7890	An Act Amending Article 286, Section Three, Chapter Two, Title Nine Of Act No. 3815, As Amended, Otherwise Known As The Revised Penal Code (1995)
R.A. No 8173	An Act Granting All Citizens' Arms Equal Opportunity To Be Accredited By The Commission On Elections, Amending For The Purpose Republic Act Numbered Seventy-One Hundred And Sixty-Six, As Amended (1995)
R.A. No. 8189	Voter Registration Act of 1996
R.A. No. 8295	Lone Candidate in Special Elections of 1997
R.A. No. 8436	Automated Elections System Law of 1997
R.A. No. 9006	Fair Election Act of 2001
R.A. No. 9189	Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003
R.A. No. 9225	Citizen Retention and Re-acquisition Act of 2003
R.A. No. 9224	An Act Eliminating The Preparatory Recall Assembly As A Mode Of Instituting Recall Of Elective Local Government Officials, Amending For The Purpose Sections 70 And 71, Chapter 5, Title One, Book I Of Republic Act No. 7160, Otherwise Known As The "Local Government Code Of 1991", And For Other Purposes (2004).
R.A. No. 9369	Revised Automated Election Law of 2007 (amending R.A. No. 8436)
R.A. No. 10367	Mandatory Biometrics Law of 2012
R.A. No. 10366	An Act Authorizing The Commission On Elections To Establish Precincts Assigned To Accessible Polling Places Exclusively For Persons With Disabilities And Senior Citizens (2013)
R.A. No. 10590	Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003 (amending R.A. No. 9189) (2013)
R.A. 11207	An Act Providing For Reasonable Rates For Political Advertisements, Amending For The Purpose Section 11 Of Republic Act No. 9006, Otherwise Known As The "Fair Election Act" (2019)

Second, focusing on campaign financing in the Philippines, the Omnibus Election Code and RA 7166 set it to PHP 10 (USD 0.20) per voter for president and vice president and PHP 3 (USD 0.06) per voter for senators and representatives (with party lists considered as one candidate). For those without any political party or support from a political party, such candidates are allowed to spend PHP 5 (USD 0.08) per voter in their respective constituency. Despite these modest standards, Co et al. (2005) and Eusebio (2021) cite problems ranging from exorbitant spending to the concentration of funding at the hands of individual candidates rather than parties. Furthermore, as Co et al. (2005) note, deviation from these standards renders candidates vulnerable to rent-seeking behavior from private interests, while incumbent candidates with access to government funding can gain an advantage at the expense of non-incumbents. In other words, money becomes the key to electoral victory. To illustrate the extent of aggressive campaign financing, estimations from Eusebio (2021) in Table 2 below show that during the 2007 elections, excess was the norm for major elected positions.

Table 2. Estimated Extent of Unregulated Campaign Finance in the 2007 General Elections

Position and Estimated. Average Voting Population (2007)	Commonly Known Max. Estimated Cost (PHP)	Estimated Allowable Costs (PHP)
City Mayor (1,092,809)	10,000,000	3,278,427.00
Governor (1,520,893)	150,000,000	4,562,679
Senate (48,221,863)	500,000,000	144,665,589
President (48,221,863)	5,000,000,000	482,218,630

In 2022, the COMELEC, through Resolution No. 10730 under Republic Act No. 9006 (Fair Election Act of 2001), affirms the PHP 674 million cap for presidential and vice presidential candidates. Within this limit, data from the COMELEC (as cited in De Leon 2022) shows the expenditures for presidential and vice presidential candidates remain severely asymmetrical. Tables 3 and 4 show that gaps between candidates are wide enough to cast doubt over the supposed fair competitiveness of elections, at least in terms of campaign financing.

Table 3. Expenditures of 2022 Presidential Candidates (PHP)

Name	Out of Personal Funds	Out of Cash Contributions	Out of in-kind Contributions	Total Expenditures
Marcos, Ferdinand Jr.	0	371,795,857	251,434,320	623,230,177
Robredo, Leni	19,779	388,327,500	0	388,347,279
Domagoso, Isko Moreno	1,126,999	241,500,000	0	242,626,999
Lacson, Ping	0	70,763,817	89,538,500	160,302,317
Pacquiao, Manny Pacman	62,677,926	7,750,000	48,700,988	119,128,914
De Guzman, Leody	0	1,000,203	0	1,000,203
Montemayor, Jose	P100,000.00	P0.00	P0.00	P100,000.00

Note: Candidates Ernesto Abella, Norberto Gonzales, and Faisal Mangondato failed to file their Statement of Contribution and Expenditures before the June 9, 2022 deadline.

Table 4. Expenditures of 2022 Vice-Presidential Candidates (PHP)

Name	Out of Personal Funds	Out of Cash Contributions	Out of in-kind Contributions	Total Expenditures
Duterte, Sara	0	0	216,190,935	216,190,935
Sotto, Vicente III	49,391,478	30,000,000	77,763,832	157,155,310
Pangilinan, Kiko	21,096,601	109,520,000	0	130,616,601
Lopez, Manny SD	1,069,349	600,000	140,000	1,809,349
Ong, Doc Willie	522,257	0	0	522,257
Atienza, Lito	240,807	0	0	240,807
Serapio, Carlos	218,370	0	0	218,370
Bello, Walden	0	0	0	0

Note: Candidate Rizalito David failed to file a Statement of Contribution and Expenditures before the June 9, 2022 deadline.

Third, The Philippines' electoral system, primarily based on a mixed electoral method combining first-past-the-post and proportional representation elements, aims to balance majority rule and minority rights. Related legislation on party-list organizations⁵ is supposed to facilitate a transition to proportional representation while opening an expanding venue for marginalized groups. Section 2 of R.A. 7941 or the Party-List System Act⁶ states that:

The State shall promote proportional representation in the election of representatives to the House of Representatives through a party-list system of registered national, regional and sectoral parties or organizations or coalitions thereof, which will enable Filipino citizens belonging to the marginalized and underrepresented sectors, organizations and parties, and who lack well-defined political constituencies but who could contribute to the formulation and enactment of appropriate legislation that will benefit the nation as a whole, to become members of the House of Representatives. Towards this end, the State shall develop and guarantee a full, free and open party system in order to attain the broadest possible representation of party, sectoral or group interests in the House of Representatives by enhancing their chances to compete for and win seats in the legislature, and shall provide the simplest scheme possible.

For Bernas (2009), appropriate limits must be placed on defining marginalized and underrepresented sectors in order to ensure that it will not indiscriminately include questionable organizations. Although Section 5 of the Party-List System Act lists down considered sectors, namely labor, peasant, fisherfolk, urban poor, indigenous

⁵ Section 3.a of R.A. 7941 states that: "The party-list system is a mechanism of proportional representation in the election of representatives to the House of Representatives from national, regional, and sectoral parties or organizations or coalitions thereof registered with the Commission on Elections (COMELEC). Component parties or organizations of a coalition may participate independently provided the coalition of which they form part does not participate in the party-list system."

⁶ An Act Providing for the Election of Party-List Representatives through the Party-List System, and Appropriating Funds Therefor, Rep. Act. No. 7941, sec. 3, (Mar. 3, 1995).

<https://comelec.gov.ph/?r=References/RelatedLaws/ElectionLaws/RA7941>

cultural communities, elderly, handicapped, women, youth, veterans, overseas workers, and professionals, Section 3 of R.A. 7941 opens it to other forms of organizations, namely national and regional parties,⁷ while leaving the determination of individual representatives to their respective organizations. The latter opens the system to arrangements where an individual representative is not from the sector that he/she represents.

During the 2022 Elections, a total of 178 party-list groups ran for office. Table 5 below shows a list of the winners, indicating that 56 party-list organizations occupy 63 seats in the House of Representatives, facing 316 district representatives. Beyond mere numbers, Rodan (2018, 118) states that “entrenched elite privilege in the Philippines has continually triumphed over reform elements in the struggle over democratic representation via a PLS [Party-list System], principally by promoting particularist ideologies of representation and institutionalizing political fragmentation.” Sectoral representatives, who are supposed to be the dominant type in a party-list system as a means of catering to marginalized groups, must contend with regional representatives who, at least formally, are pushing for the welfare of a respective ethnolinguistic or regional group (cf. Bueza 2022). To an extent, such representatives can be considered redundant to district representatives.

Moreover, as Rodan (ibid.) notes, the development of party-list representation is characterized by the entrenchment of elite interests and the weakness of progressive and left-leaning groups. The leading party-list organization during the 2022 elections was the ACT-CIS, led by Erwin Tulfo, a long-standing TV personality and the brother of incumbent Senator Raffy Tulfo, himself a TV personality. For the latter, the weakness of left-leaning and progressive groups was evident in 2022 when prominent party-list members of the Makabayan Bloc (Makabayang Koalisyon ng Mamamayan or *Patriotic Coalition of the People*) lost their long-held seats in the House of Representatives.

Table 5. Partial List of Elected Party-List Groups (House of Representatives)

Name	Votes	Seats
ACT-CIS Partylist (Anti-Crime and Terrorism Community Involvement and Support Partylist)	2,111,091	3
1-RIDER PARTYLIST (Ang Buklod ng mga Motorista ng Pilipinas)	1,001,243	2
TINGOG (Tingog Sinirangan)	886,959	2
4Ps (PAGTIBAYIN AT PALAGUIN ANG PANGKABUHAYANG PILIPINO)	848,237	2
AKO BICOL (Ako Bicol Political Party)	816,445	2
SAGIP (Social Amelioration & Genuine Intervention on Poverty)	780,456	2
ANG PROBINSYANO	714,634	1
USWAG ILONGGO PARTY	689,607	1
TUTOK TO WIN	685,587	1
CIBAC (Citizens' Battle Against Corruption)	637,044	1
SENIOR CITIZENS PARTYLIST (Coalition of Associations of Senior Citizens in the Philippines, INC.)	614,671	1
DUTERTE YOUTH	602,196	1
AGIMAT (Agimat ng Masa)	586,909	1
KABATAAN (Kabataan Partylist)	536,690	1

⁷ Section 3.d of R.A. 7941 states that: “It is a national party when its constituency is spread over the geographical territory of at least a majority of the regions. It is a regional party when its constituency is spread over the geographical territory of at least a majority of the cities and provinces comprising the region.”

Bionat (2021) asserts that the party-list system remains rife with problems that can threaten the representative function of party-list organizations. The 20% cap in the allotment of seats in the House of Representatives and the formula used to give a maximum of 3 seats per party-list group prevents the expansion of proportional representation in the House of Representatives. Overall, the party-list system is a manifestation of severe limitations in the design of democratic representation in the country.

Current reform efforts embodied in Senate Bill No. 179 (An Act Providing For The New Omnibus Election Code Of 2022) gravitate around bringing the OEC in line with recent developments and persistent problems ranging from the rise of online campaigns to the issue of party-list representation and absentee voting (Revised Omnibus Election Code 2022; Tulad 2022). According to its explanatory and introductory note, Senate Bill No. 179 is meant to consolidate previous electoral laws to address:

the weaknesses of the automated election systems and the greater need for more transparency require the adoption of a hybrid system. Also, the rampant abuses of the party-list system necessitate an overhaul of its implementation. In addition, the need to ensure that senior citizens, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, indigenous peoples, and internally displaced persons are given ample opportunity to cast their votes calls for the expansion of local absentee voting and the institutionalization of the emergency accessible polling places. Finally, the rise of a new avenue for political campaigns—the use of the internet and social media—requires the institution of contemporary measures in the areas of campaign propaganda and campaign finance. [authors' italics]

The structures of representative politics in the Philippines breed a limited system of accountability that caters to sustaining the rule of elites rather than holding policy-makers responsible to their constituents. Two persistent issues come to mind, namely, political dynasties and party-switching. Both are key features of the Philippines' defective system characterized by the prevalence of personalistic over policy-oriented modes of electoral campaigning and the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in decision-making bodies.

Political parties in the Philippines often show weak ideological coherence and are seen as vehicles for individual political ambitions rather than institutions for shaping public policy and aggregating interests. Mendoza et al. (2014) show that from 1987 to 2010, party-switching in the House of Representatives was at an average of 33.49%.⁸ Moreover, between 2004 and 2013, the share of turncoats in the House of Representatives increased by 20% to 45%. These trends contribute to the constant formation of super-majorities in the House of Representatives that are commonly under the umbrella of the incumbent administration.

The prominence of political dynasties marks the concentration of power and wealth in certain areas of the Philippines. Due to the absence of implementing legislation on the anti-political dynasty provisions of the 1987 Constitution, fat dynasties (i.e., families with two or more members in elected office) have continued at both the national and local levels (Mendoza and Banaag 2017; Mendoza et al. 2019a, 2019b). Mendoza et al. (2019b, 3) states that:

⁸ Mendoza et al. (2014, 9-10) states that their method “compares the party affiliation of a legislator in a given legislative term with his official party label(s) in all previous elections he ran for (regardless of whether he won or not, and irrespective of the position he vied for) since 2001” in order to provide a more comprehensive account.

Covering all local positions, the percentage of fat dynasties has increased from 19% in 1988 to 29% in 2017, growing at about 1%, or around 170 positions, per election period. In 2001, there were 1303 political clans with 2 family members, 257 political clans with 3 family members, and 157 political clans with 4 or more family members. These numbers have risen to 1443, 335 and 189, respectively, in 2010, and to 1548, 339, and 217, respectively in 2019.

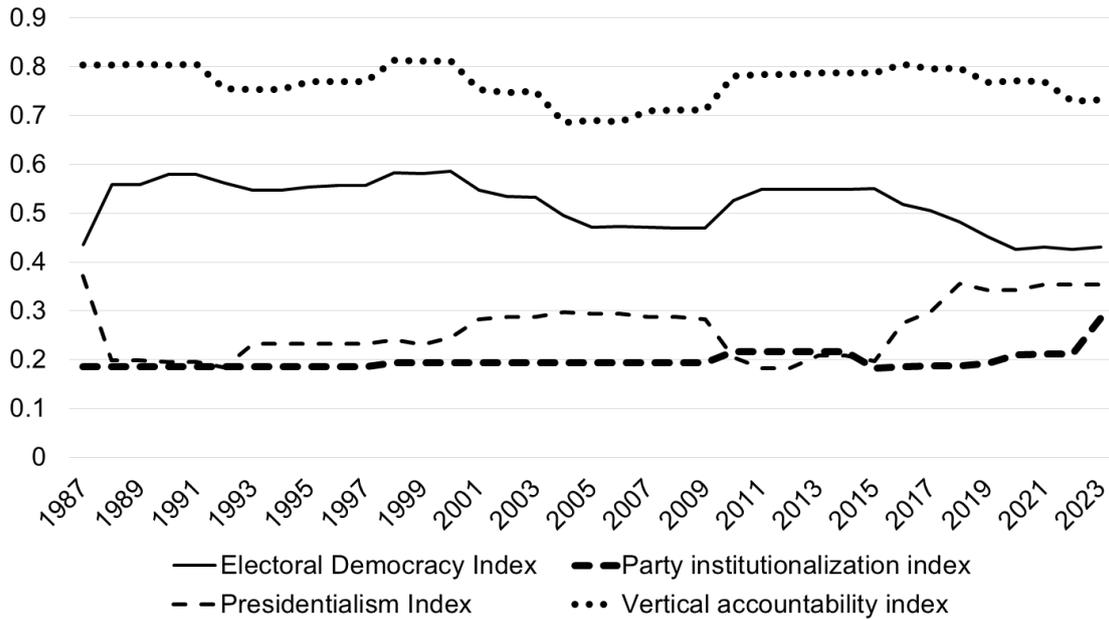
Dynastic politics remain a prominent feature of Philippine politics. This study considers the impact of such oligarchic structures on vertical accountability, namely, the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of fewer and fewer people. Moreover, concerning a weak political party system, the process of democratic backsliding, characterized by executive aggrandizement, was reflected in a series of actions that undermined the independence of state and societal institutions during the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte. Through a super-majority coalition following the 2016 national elections, the executive encroached on the powers of the co-equal branches of government and stymied the exercise of media freedom. The PDP-Laban (Partido Demokratiko Pilipino–Lakas ng Bayan) led the coalition, the party of the executive, together with the Nacionalista Party, National People’s Coalition, National Unity Party, Lakas-CMD (Lakas–Christian Muslim Democrats), and various party-list organizations. Ironically, the bulk of the elected representatives from the Liberal Party, the former administration party, joined the majority instead of the minority bloc. The upper chamber had a similar realignment, with the parties identified with the administration forming a majority bloc to support the president’s legislative agenda (Magno and Teehankee 2022).

In Figure 1 below, the database *Varieties of Democracy* (V-Dem) (Coppedge et al. 2023) shows that the vertical accountability index of the Philippines registered an average of 0.76 from 1986 to 2023 (post-EDSA period). On a scale from low to high (0-1), this index measures electoral accountability (i.e., the quality of elections, enfranchisement, and direct election of the chief executive) and the general quality of political parties (i.e., barriers to party formation and the autonomy of parties from the ruling regime).

This result is juxtaposed with the following, first of which is the party institutionalization index that measures the following aspects of the incumbent political party system: (1) party organization, (2) linkages with civil society, (3) the presence of distinct party platforms, and (4) party cohesion within an elected legislature. The Philippines holds an average score of 0.19 – a low and sustained score that reflects the weakness of political parties in the Philippines. Second is the electoral democracy index, measuring the quality of both elections and political freedoms between elections (e.g., freedom of the press and expression). The Philippines scores an average of 0.51 after experiencing a decrease from 2015 to 2022. Lastly is the presidentialism index, which measures the systemic concentration of political power in the hands of one individual at the expense of delegation. The point estimates for this index have been reversed such that the directionality is opposite to the input variables. Lower scores indicate less presidentialist tendencies and vice versa.⁹ The Philippines holds an average of 0.27 after experiencing a gradual increase from 2015 to 2023.

⁹ This study notes that V-Dem measure presidentialism in line with the following: (1) executive respect for the constitution, (2) mechanisms for oversight of the executive other than the legislature, (3) the legislature controlling its own resources, and investigates the executive in practice; (4) independence of high and lower courts, (5) executive compliance with high courts and the judiciary (v2jucomp), and (6) the autonomy of the electoral management body.

Figure 1. Varieties of Democracy Indices



These scores suggest that while Philippine politics enjoy a vibrant electoral system, it is founded more on individual leaders than party politics. It also shows that presidentialism, though muted compared to the authoritarian period under Ferdinand Marcos Sr., remains a threat given the above considerations on super-majorities in the House of Representatives. The succeeding sections flesh out vertical accountability from a psycho-political perspective, first in terms of citizen-leader relations and second with the issue of demand for accountability vis-à-vis values and attitudes towards political parties.

3. Citizen-Leader Relations and a Weak Demand for Accountability

Most Filipinos are keen on voting. Data from Table 6 shows as much through sustained voter turnout levels that are way above the 50% mark. Alongside this collective habit of regularly going to the polls is the vibrant and dramatic spectacle of Filipino electoral politics characterized by a myriad of events ranging from mass rallies, dancing politicians, and celebrity endorsements to more malevolent situations like election-related violence and fraud. Beneath all this, the Filipino political psyche begs analysis of what lies behind a person’s vote – what the values and attitudes that form the basis of electoral behavior are among Filipinos. Though this study will not provide an exhaustive account of this issue, it contributes to ongoing analyses of political values and attitudes among Filipinos.

Table 6. Voter Turnout Rates in the Philippines (1987 to 2022)

Election Year	Voter Turnout (%)	Total vote	Registration	VAP Turnout (%)	Voting age population (VAP)
2022	83.83	55,114,084	65,745,512	78.7	70,026,672
2019	74.31	47,296,442	63,643,263	71.91	65,771,984
2016	81.95	44,549,212	54,363,844	72.17	61,728,990
2010	74.98	38,162,985	50,896,164	69.93	54,574,173
2007	63.68	28,945,710	45,453,236	54.87	52,752,550
2004	76.97	33,510,092	43,536,028	68.77	48,727,136
2001	81.08	27,709,510	34,176,376	64.75	42,795,056
1998	78.75	26,902,536	34,163,465	66.78	40,287,296
1995	70.68	25,736,505	36,415,154	68.35	37,652,450
1992	70.56	22,654,194	32,105,782	65.29	34,699,860
1987	90	23,760,000	26,400,000	78.16	30,398,680

Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance Database

<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/advanced-search?tid=293>

The question of citizen-leader relations is a fundamental aspect of representative democracy. The manner in which citizens perceive their relationship with leaders, the interactions between the represented and representatives, and the expectations of ordinary citizens regarding the role of elected officials as representatives of the public good are fundamental aspects that shape the dynamics and activities of elites within such a system (cf. Dovi 2012). Schmitter (2015, 36) sums it up as a two-way system, wherein citizens “with equal political rights and obligations have at their disposal regular and reliable means to access information, demand justification, and apply sanctions on their rulers,” who in turn can enjoy political legitimacy and a level of support despite criticisms from the general public.

Tied with a Schumpeterian interpretation of democracy as a process of political elites circulating through competitive elections, the issue of citizen-leader relations can be seen as intimately tied with that of electoral accountability. Ashworth (2012) posits that electoral accountability can be construed as a system of rewards and punishments that can ensure policymakers remain responsive to the will and welfare of their constituents. In essence, it is a congruence between the interests and conduct of policymakers and their constituents (cf. Hellwig and Samuels 2008).

Despite the ideals that underpin such a schema, the circulation of elites can result in the consolidation of power in the hands of a few if conditions become disempowering for the ordinary citizen (Borja 2015, 2017). In other words, electoral accountability can collapse under the weight of power asymmetry. Consequently, such a vicious cycle can result in a democratic crisis driven by the disempowerment of the ruled and a lack of obligations and accountability among rulers (Stoker 2006; Stoker and Evans 2014; Schmitter 2015).

Regarding the psycho-political tendencies underlying the struggle for vertical accountability, we note that many Filipinos exhibit illiberal tendencies toward leaders and incumbent institutions (Borja 2023). Table 7 below shows that from the *Asia Barometer Survey* (ABS)¹⁰ (N=1200, Margin of Error ± 3), many are willing to give absolute power to those they deem as “morally upright” despite supporting the sustenance of incumbent institutions for political representation, at least before the end of the EDSA regime and the rise Rodrigo Duterte and Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to the presidency.

Table 7. Values on Citizen-Leader Relations I (Asia Barometer Survey) (Percentage)

Wave	3 (2010)	4 (2014)	5 (2018-19)
If we have political leaders who are morally upright, we can let them decide everything.			
Strongly Agree	22.4	24.2	29.7
Agree	37.3	38.7	34.3
Disagree	27.9	24.9	8.2
Strongly Disagree	11.9	11.9	5.0
Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions.			
Strongly Agree	14.6	14.7	31.2
Agree	25.4	32.2	36.9
Disagree	36.0	35.5	11.7
Strongly Disagree	23.4	17.1	7.1
We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things.			
Strongly Agree	10.7	9.9	15.7
Agree	23.7	23.0	25.8
Disagree	27.9	32.2	12.8
Strongly Disagree	36.5	34.2	20.7
The army (military) should come in to govern the country.			
Strongly Agree	7.9	8.1	20.3
Agree	16.1	20.2	34.2
Disagree	30.9	30.0	11.4
Strongly Disagree	44.2	40.7	15.9
We should get rid of elections and parliaments and have experts make decisions on behalf of the people.			
Strongly Agree	5.3	3.9	14.3
Agree	12.1	13.7	30.4
Disagree	28.6	32.1	13.9
Strongly Disagree	53.0	49.7	16.1

Table 8 shows that many citizens see government leaders more as autonomous trustees who can identify and pursue the interests of their constituents. They also consider the government more as a parent who can decide on what is “good” for the public instead of being an employee. To flesh out the latter, wave 5 of the ABS pins

¹⁰ The Asian Barometer Project Office (www.asianbarometer.org) is solely responsible for the data distribution. The Asian Barometer Survey is headquartered in Taipei and co-hosted by the Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica, and the Institute for the Advanced Studies of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Taiwan University. The views expressed herein are the authors’ own.

down the issue of accountability. It asks respondents whether it is more important for citizens to hold the government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly or vice versa in favor of decisiveness at the expense of accountability. Most of the respondents from the Philippines (53.1%) favor decisiveness over accountability. Nonetheless, many Filipinos see political legitimacy as something based on open and competitive elections rather than virtue and capability sans electoral competition. However, this experienced a turn during the last wave. The appeal of strongman politics is juxtaposed with a warped understanding of representation and electoral legitimacy from these observations. We can see the psychopolitical foundations of electoral politics in the Philippines as almost Caesarist in its orientation – leader-centric at the expense of incumbent liberal institutions.

Table 8. Values on Citizen-Leader Relations II (Asia Barometer Survey) (Percentage)

Wave	3 (2010)	4 (2014)	5 (2018-19)
Leaders as Delegates or Trustees			
Leaders as Delegates (Government leaders implement what voters want.)	33.7	34.9	25.6
Leaders as Trustees (Government leaders do what they think is best for the people.)	64.9	63.7	72.7
Government as an Employee or a Parent			
Government as an Employee (Government is our employee, the people should tell government what needs to be done.)	44.3	44.1	
Government as a Parent (The government is like parent; it should decide what is good for us.)	54.5	55.0	
Government Accountability and Decisiveness			
Accountability over Decisiveness (It is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly.)			41.7
Decisiveness over Accountability (It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no influence over what it does.)			56.3
Legitimacy through Elections or Personal Attributes			
Legitimacy through Elections (Political leaders are chosen by the people through open and competitive elections.)	67.7	63.8	50.3
Legitimacy through Virtue and Capacity (Political leaders are chosen on the basis on their virtue and capability even without election.)	31.4	35.4	47.9

Data from V-Dem echoes the observations above on two accounts. First, the Philippines also scores low on the participatory democracy index with an average of 0.35. This suggests that political participation is largely

confined to the electoral process. The recent study by Borja, Torneo, and Hecita (2024) provides further insight into this phenomenon, illustrating how for many Filipinos, political participation is largely confined to the ballot. Following the casting of their votes, most individuals return to silence as spectators to a politics that they deem as beyond their capacity to control or comprehend.

Lastly, in relation to the value ascribed to the person of the president (whether they are imbuing the leader with extraordinary characteristics and abilities), the Philippines exhibits a relatively low score of 1.99 on a scale of 1 to 4 (low to high). However, there was a notable increase from 2016 to 2021, with the current value exceeding 2.0 at 2.32. The 2016 spike reflects the impact of Rodrigo Duterte's populism on pre-existing leader-centric tendencies among Filipinos (Borja 2023). The mythos constructed around him as a strongman exacerbated the emphasis on the individual leaders tied with fanaticism among supporters) of representative politics in the Philippines.

Furthermore, the spike did not revert to pre-Duterte levels due to two possible factors. The Duterte family continues to exert influence in the political sphere, with Rodrigo Duterte, his daughter Vice President Sara Duterte and son Davao City Mayor Sebastian Duterte, representing the family's distinct leadership style. Conversely, incumbent President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. embodies the long shadow cast by the authoritarian legacy of his father and namesake – the shadow of a unifying and strong-handed form of leadership (Teehankee 2023).

How might these seemingly contradictory tendencies surrounding the issue of vertical accountability be made sense of? To address this, it is important to note that expectations play a crucial role in generating demand for electoral accountability. Nonetheless, expectations are not isolated phenomena; they are shaped by multitude of cognitive factors. Such attitudes can in turn shape the evaluation of the entire political system (Svolik 2013). A consequence of repeated exposure to the corrupt and abusive practices of policymakers is that citizen-voters may come to perceive all politicians as corrupt. Consequently, this can lead to a pervasive pessimism over government, which in turn can facilitate the establishment of lower barriers for actual crooks.

From Svolik's (2013) insights on the matter, we identify two general concerns: the structural and psycho-political factors that shape expectations and the barriers that constitute electoral accountability. When considered collectively, the question arises as to whether citizen-voters can effectively (i.e., they desire it and there are institutional arrangements that accommodate such a demand) impose costs and disincentives on elected officials through the ballot. As we will demonstrate, the challenge to electoral accountability in the Philippines can be construed as a vicious cycle of weak institutions and a lack of demand from ordinary citizen-voters.

Overall, the structure of Filipino politics and the political values held by citizen-voters have rendered the system incapable of generating a demand for electoral accountability. From the perspective of cycles and habits, it can be argued that this condition is self-perpetuating, creating a vicious cycle that renders political accountability a non-issue for many Filipinos, including both citizen-voters and policymakers. How can such a cycle be broken? This essay concludes with a general assessment of political parties in relation to citizen engagement and government accountability before elaborating on certain directions for reform.

4. Assessment: On Political Parties, Citizen Engagement, and Government Accountability

Political parties are intended to aggregate interests and serve as a bridge between the government and the citizens. However, internal fragmentation and a lack of genuine policy-based competition frequently undermine their effectiveness. Regarding dynastic and oligarchic politics, it also appears that party politics are only secondary to these two other forms, primarily serving as formal vehicles for particular interests.

Much has been said about the impacts of a weak political party system and dynastic politics on vertical accountability and democratization (see Arugay 2005; Caritos and Yadao 2024; Hutchcroft 2020; Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2012; Kasuya and Teehankee 2020; Maambong 2001; Mendoza and Banaag 2017; Mendoza et al. 2019a, 2019b; Rivera 2016; Rodan 2018; Teehankee and Calimbahin 2020). Nonetheless, this study notes a recent examination by Aguirre (2023) as a means of providing a brief overview of party-movement dynamics. In looking at the post-authoritarian regime, Aguirre (ibid.) illustrates that the relationship between political parties and social movements is characterized by a dance of contention, cooperation, and even cooptation. How this dance plays out eventually affects the trajectory of democratization (e.g., in terms of inclusion, the expansion of rights, redistribution of wealth and power, etc.). In more specific terms and echoing previous works on party politics and patronage in the Philippines, Aguirre (ibid., 171) states that the dynamics between social movements and political parties are affected by:

- a) dominance of political dynasties, especially with its exclusive access to wealth and power;
- b) clientelistic-patronage relations with its systemic and uninterrupted flow of resources to networks of control;
- c) malleability of the middle class and its newfound worth and importance that makes this class autonomous and believe that it is capable of producing its own class of leaders; and
- d) unresolved tensions among the Left movements that continue to cripple any effort for a concerted move to push for substantial and long-term reforms in the society.

In summary, party politics in the Philippines gravitate around the concentration of power and the prominence of patronage and money politics as obstacles to expanding and developing vertical accountability. The sheer lack of political party institutionalization renders internal party politics a game for party elites, with ordinary citizens being reduced into mobilized entities. One thing is for sure: sophisticated party political functions (e.g., party conventions) like those found in the United States and the West are either rare or non-existent among Philippine political parties.

Thus, this section looks at the issue from a psycho-political perspective. Specifically, this section assesses the Filipino political party system concerning how citizens relate to political parties and in comparison to other multi-party systems in Southeast Asia, namely, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. This study notes the following sampling considerations listed in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Sampling and Margins of Error

Wave	3		4		5	
	Sample size	Margin of error	Sample size	Margin of error	Sample size	Margin of error
Philippines	1,200	± 3%	1,200	± 3%	1,200	± 3%
Thailand	1,512	± 2%	1,200	± 3%	1,200	± 3%
Indonesia	1,550	± 2.5 %	1,550	± 2.5 %	1,540	± 2.5 %
Malaysia	1,214	± 3%	1,206	± 3%	1,237	± 2.79 %

Note: The respective time frames of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th ABS waves are as follows: (1) Philippines (2010, 2014, 2018—19); (2) Thailand (2010, 2014, 2018—19); (3) Indonesia (2011, 2016, 2019); (4) Malaysia (2011, 2014, 2019).

Table 10 shows that most citizens in Indonesia and Malaysia have expressed consistent levels of distrust towards political parties. The contrary is true for those in the Philippines and Thailand. Despite such levels of trust, Table 11 below shows that party membership is low and decreasing in the case of the Philippines. Party membership is generally low for the four cases, but Malaysia experiences comparatively higher levels than its neighbors.

Table 10. Trust in Political Parties (Percentage)

Wave	Philippines			Thailand		
	3	4	5	3	4	5
Trust	35.8	31.9	68.0	35.5	38.6	54.6
Distrust	62.5	65.9	29.0	49.6	51.9	35.5
Wave	Indonesia			Malaysia		
	3	4	3	4	3	4
Trust	42.1	39.2	42.1	39.2	42.1	39.2
Distrust	48.3	51.5	48.3	51.5	48.3	51.5

Table 11. Party Membership (Percentage)

Wave	3	4	5
Philippines	1.6	1.8	0.8
Thailand	0.6	1.8	0.1
Indonesia	4.4	2.1	2.7
Malaysia	10.3	6.3	10.4

Table 12 below shows some additional measurements of partisanship in terms of active expressions of support and feelings of proximity to specific political parties. This study observes general inaction in electoral partisan activities, especially in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Concerning party affinity, most of the respondents from Malaysia and, to an extent, the Philippines have expressed positive attitudes. The contrary is true for respondents from Indonesia and Thailand. Among those who felt close to a political party, more respondents from Malaysia expressed higher levels of proximity than those from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. This study leaves the meaning of “feeling close” to parties for future and more qualitative inquiries. What can be noted is that for the Philippines, association with political parties is not

aligned with either membership or participation in party activities. Given the high levels of voter turnout, it is plausible that party association among ordinary Filipinos is only enough to make citizens go to the ballot.

Table 12. Party Association in Multi-Party Systems (Percentage)

Wave	Philippines			Thailand		
	3	4	5	3	4	5
Q: Attend a campaign meeting or rally*						
Yes	20.4	18.9	17.0	53.8	39.2	33.4
No	66.4	80.6	82.2	44.7	55.3	62.1
Q: Try to persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party*						
Yes	18.5	21.6	23.0	23.1	17.4	11.3
No	68.2	77.8	76.3	74.3	75.9	82.6
Q: Did you do anything else to help out or work for a party or candidate running in the election?*						
Yes	15.6	14.6	16.7	11.7	8.5	3.5
No	71.3	84.8	82.8	84.8	85.0	90.4
Q: Among the political parties listed here, which party if any do you feel closest to?						
Do not feel close to any political party	46.9	41.0	39.2	60.5	70.8	65.3
Q: How close do you feel to (Specific Political Party)? **						
Very close	13.6	16.3	15.0	14.9	8.0	7.1
Somewhat close	40.7	50.5	44.3	31.5	31.7	24.8
Just a little close	45.7	33.2	40.7	53.5	60.3	68.0
Wave	Indonesia			Malaysia		
	3	4	5	3	4	5
Q: Attend a campaign meeting or rally*						
Yes	26.2	15.74	8.4	31.5	31.8	31.6
No	71.7	81.81	90.6	67.8	67.8	68.4
Q: Try to persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party*						
Yes	18.7	13.4	9.4	15.4	16.9	17.1
No	80.1	85.2	89.5	83.5	82.7	82.8
Q: Did you do anything else to help out or work for a party or candidate running in the election?*						
Yes	11.3	8.8	6.8	19.9	20.5	19.8
No	87.1	89.7	92.6	79.1	79.0	80.1
Q: Among the political parties listed here, which party if any do you feel closest to?						
Do not feel close to any political party		79.7	84.8	10.7	9.0	41.1
Q: How close do you feel to (Specific Political Party)? **						
Very close	11.3	9.5	11.5	38.3	32.2	29.1
Somewhat close	46.3	53.7	39.6	44.6	45.3	49.0
Just a little close	42.4	36.7	49.0	17.1	22.5	21.9

Notes:

* These questions were asked in the context of a national election.

** This study did not focus on specific parties and will leave this matter for future inquiries.

Concerning their values toward the political party system, this study notes that when asked about their preference for a multi-party or single-party system, Table 13 shows a general aversion towards a single-party system. However, there are certain nuances to this general tendency, with the Philippines experiencing a growing preference for a single-party system. At the same time, the contrary is true for other multi-party systems where there is an increasing aversion to the possibility of a single-party system.

Table 13. Political Party System Preference in Multi-Party Systems (Percentage)

Q: Only one political party should be allowed to stand for election and hold office.						
Wave	Philippines			Thailand		
	3	4	5	3	4	5
Strongly approve	10.9	8.2	11.4	6.3	9.3	2.7
Somewhat approve	20.6	21.3	29.7	12.2	21.6	11.3
Somewhat disapprove	29.8	32.7	38.5	24.1	27.0	31.3
Strongly disapprove	37.7	37.2	19.5	51.5	30.8	34.7

Wave	Indonesia			Malaysia		
	3	4	5	3	4	5
Strongly approve	1.2	1.1	0.4	9.4	11.3	7.3
Somewhat approve	14.7	8.9	6.8	16.5	15.7	15.6
Somewhat disapprove	68.6	64.5	63.6	31.3	24.5	28.6
Strongly disapprove	8.9	11.1	15.3	39.5	46.1	47.3

Overall, in line with the summary in Table 14 below, juxtaposed with certain contradictory tendencies between specific and general anti-party attitudes is a preference for strong elected leaders. What are the probable implications of this condition? For those under multi-party systems who are distant from specific political parties, their qualified commitment to a multi-party system is probably due to their want of a strong leader. Specifically, their ideal is likely for a multi-party system to allow the coalescence of political parties under a strong leader, which gives an image of citizens tolerating a system populated by weak and indistinct political parties—party cartelization—that can produce “strong” leaders.

Table 14. Summary of Observations

	Philippines	Thailand	Indonesia	Malaysia
Specific Political Party Support				
Dis/Trust Towards Political Parties	Distrust	Distrust	Distrust	Trust
Party Membership	Decreasing	Decreasing	Decreasing	Increasing
Party Affinity	Average and Decreasing	Low and Decreasing	Low and Decreasing	High with steep Decrease ³
Party Activism	Low and Decreasing	Low and Decreasing	Low and Decreasing	Low and Decreasing
General Political Party Support				
Support for One-Party Rule	^ Approval v Disapproval	^ Disapproval v Approval	^ Disapproval v Approval	^ Disapproval - Approval
One-party rule is essential to democracy	Ambivalent	Ambivalent	Disapprove	Ambivalent

5. Areas for Reform

This study shows that alongside limitations in the electoral and political party systems, there is a value system leaning more toward giving more license to leaders instead of holding them accountable as public servants in the Philippines. The nature of this problem requires a concerted effort to address both the supply and demand sides of vertical accountability. In other words, reform must be encompassing. It must strive to establish a fair, competitive, and substantially representative electoral system populated by strong and policy-oriented political and sectoral parties while enhancing demand for accountability by decreasing reliance on leaders and promises of goodwill from elected officials. To this end, this study recognizes the following areas for reform:

Institutional Mechanisms beyond Elections: Beyond periodic elections, several mechanisms must enable citizens to hold their government accountable, including the impeachment process, public consultations, increased civic activism, and the media. The effectiveness and accessibility of these mechanisms are analyzed to understand their role in fostering a responsive and responsible government. Local participatory governance (e.g., participatory budgeting) is one key policy at the local level that facilitates the entry of constituents into the halls of local government, thus exposing elected officials to the scrutinizing gaze of ordinary citizens while allowing the latter to enjoy a greater share in public affairs. The Naga City case, which started during the term of Mayor Jesse M. Robredo, still stands as a model for participatory local governance in the Philippines. At the level of national electoral politics, the institutionalization of authentic debates among candidates, as well as town hall meetings and open conversations between them and ordinary citizens, could reduce the impact of one-way political marketing and increase the demand for candidates to clarify and concretize their stand on specific issues. Another possible area for development is promoting and developing plebiscitary mechanisms for vital local and national legislation. The case of Palawan, where ordinary citizens resisted efforts to split the province into three political jurisdictions, stands as an invaluable but rare occasion highlighting the value of plebiscites (Fabro 2021).

Strengthening Political Parties as Institutions of Representation: To enhance their function as effective democratic tools, Philippine political parties require significant reform. This section suggests specific measures such as enforcing party loyalty, strengthening policy-based platforms, enhancing internal democracy, and improving transparency and accountability mechanisms within parties. There is a need for the passage of a Political Party Development Act that would strengthen the political party system and build democratic institutions. To this end, House Bill No. 488 of the 19th Congress seeks to accomplish the following: (1) institutionalize reforms in campaign financing to promote accountability and transparency; (2) provide financial subsidies to political parties for the sake of campaigns and party development; (3) promote party loyalty and discipline; (4) support voter's education and civic literacy programs through political parties. Despite its promises, House Bill No. 488 remains to be enacted as law. Reforms are also necessary to better align the Party-List system with the representation of marginalized sectors. However, there are recent attempts to use party-list system reform as a means to crack down on leftist organizations by tagging them as part of communist insurgencies. An example is Senate Bill No. 201, pursuant to the contested R.A. 11479 (the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020).

Necessary Political and Electoral Reforms: This study proposes comprehensive reforms aimed at improving the electoral system's capacity to represent diverse voter interests and enhance political accountability. Recommendations include the introduction of anti-dynasty laws, campaign finance reform, electoral system adjustments to ensure more proportional representation, and enhanced regulatory oversight

of party activities. The legislation of a Campaign Finance Reform Act would regulate campaign contributions and promote transparency in sources of funds and campaign expenditures, which is directed squarely at the structures of money politics for the sake of a more inclusive and fair electoral process wherein the sheer power of campaign financing will not hinder candidates who are outside prominent and powerful patronage networks. Moreover, strict regulations on candidate substitution should be in place, given the games of substitution played by prominent candidates during the 2022 National Elections have rendered the mechanism subject to abuse (Aning 2024; Torres 2024). Overall, electoral reforms must make the electoral process less vulnerable to the political and financial machinations of the ruling elites.

Enhancing Civic Education and Open Data Dashboards: There is a need to enhance civic education – for citizens to demand capacity, performance, and accountability from leaders. Knowledge partnerships can be forged to co-produce open data dashboards that show the performance of politicians and political parties, which would help citizens appreciate the use of data in making electoral choices. Building a deliberative democracy involves the pursuit of civic education and the development of knowledge intermediaries and policy think tanks to help citizens recognize the value of data and performance to guide them in holding leaders accountable (Magno 2022). There is a need to harness universities, policy think tanks, and other knowledge institutions to serve as information intermediaries to help citizen voters make sense of policy reports, technical data, budget documents, and audit reports to make performance evaluations of parties and groups offering to lead the country. Ongoing efforts like PARTICIPATE¹¹ can help bring electoral politics closer to citizen voters while exposing them to critical assessments of local and national politics. Moreover, civic education must be directed not only at ordinary citizens but also at party elites via regular efforts in bottom-up party development activities that can ensure, at most, the reform of old parties and, at least, the emergence of more policy-oriented and internal democratic parties.

In summary, these areas for reform have two main objectives. The first is to foster electoral and political party systems that place accountability as a core principle by being less vulnerable to the impacts of money and dynastic politics. The second is to generate demand for accountability among ordinary citizens by making them less and less reliant on leaders – exorcising the shadow of messianic tendencies – through civic empowerment.

6. Conclusion: *The Long Road Ahead*

The ability of political parties and the electoral system to effectively represent and respond to the electorate in the Philippines is currently suboptimal. From a psycho-political perspective, the current system has failed to both sway citizens away from a reliance on leaders and to embrace the ideal of policy-oriented political parties, in terms of both association and actual participation in party activities. Strengthening these institutions through targeted reforms is essential for enhancing democratic governance and ensuring that government actions consistently reflect the will and interests of the people.

One can easily say that change does not happen overnight. However, such a dictum veils the reality that the relationship between structures and individual agency is shaped by the role of habits. In other words, the question of electoral accountability in the Philippines becomes a matter of disrupting the habits of policymakers and citizen-voters that devalue accountability itself. A great deal has been written about the possibility of reforming the political system in the Philippines, particularly in relation to the political party

¹¹ <https://www.inclusivedemocracy.ph/participate>

system. Proposals have been put forth to strengthen party discipline by imposing penalties for defections and encouraging parties to adopt a more programmatic approach to elections.

Moreover, mass-based parties continue to represent the gold standard for reformist efforts. Such a system can only function effectively if political parties can serve as a genuinely democratic conduit between ordinary citizens and the policy-making process. This democratic function must be twofold. Firstly, political parties must facilitate political participation outside of the electoral process. Such involvement need not be contingent upon formal party membership. Nonetheless, it is imperative that political parties are able to facilitate effective non-electoral modes of participation. Secondly, mass-based parties must ensure that representation is contingent upon accountability, rather than being based on idolatry or acquiescence. It is possible for a political party to be mass-based without being accountable. This can result in the formation of a mass movement that is dependent on the charismatic leadership of a single figure. This represents a potential future for party politics in the Philippines, given the sustained leader-centric tendencies among its citizens.

Consequently, addressing the issues of personality-centric and leader-centric politics, as well as the prevalence of patronage and clientelism in the Philippines, necessitates the development of a political party system that encompasses both leaders and citizens under the umbrella of a policy-oriented approach to electoral politics.

We endorse these calls and underscore the necessity of integrating accountability as a fundamental element of civic-political education in the Philippines. In light of Svobik's (2013) insights on expectations, it is imperative that civic-political education in the Philippines be geared towards lifting the expectations of citizen-voters with regard to the ideal of electoral accountability. Nonetheless, such an approach necessitates the provision of exemplars; citizen-voters must observe and experience the possibility of holding elected officials to account in the periods preceding, during, and following elections. Thus, we return to the question of incumbent institutions, especially those concerned with justice. This gives rise to the question of rupture. If we consider vertical accountability deficit as a form of cycle, then it is important to determine at which points is this process more vulnerable and susceptible to reform.

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Country Case 8: Taiwan

The State of Vertical Accountability in Taiwan

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1. Introduction

The concept of vertical accountability entails the election of representatives by citizens through democratic processes. This mechanism provides individuals with the opportunity to choose their leaders and contribute to the formulation of governmental policies. The presidential and parliamentary elections in Taiwan are regarded as being conducted in a fair and competitive manner (Murkowski 2016). In its 2022 report, Freedom House rated Taiwan as free in both political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House 2022). As the function of vertical accountability is sound in general, this paper will examine some of the issues, both institutional and behavior, that can be further addressed to improve democratic quality or prevent a regression in this regard.

2. Taiwan's Electoral Systems

Taiwan has adopted a semi-presidential system, in which the president is directly elected and may serve up to two consecutive four-year terms. Additionally, the president has the authority to nominate and replace the premier. In Taiwan, the President is elected through a direct popular vote system. The election is held every four years, concurrently with the legislative Yuan member election. The candidate who obtains a majority of the votes cast is elected President. The President-elect serves a four-year term and may be re-elected for one consecutive term.

In Taiwan, members of the Legislative Yuan, the country's unicameral parliament, are elected through a mixed-member majoritarian system. The Legislative Yuan is comprised of 113 seats, including 73 single-member district seats, 34 party-list proportional representation seats, and six aboriginal seats. In single-member districts, the legislator is elected through a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. The candidate who receives the highest number of votes wins the seat. Each voter casts two ballots: one for the district seat and another for the party-list seats. The distribution of party-list seats is based on the proportion of the overall popular vote received by each party. Subsequently, political parties submit lists of candidates for these at-large seats, and the seats are allocated to the respective parties based on their proportion of the total votes cast. In order to gain representation in the Legislative Yuan, political parties are required to secure a

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minimum of 5% of the total valid votes cast or win at least three district seats to qualify for at-large seats. The six aboriginal seats are elected through a single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system.

As of 2024, Taiwan has held eight presidential elections and ten parliamentary elections. In 2016, Taiwan experienced its third transfer of executive authority between political parties. The previous two transfers occurred in 2000 and 2008. The 2016 election also marked the first parliamentary majority for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), one of the two main parties in addition to the Kuomintang (KMT). In 2024, the DPP continued to secure the presidency, yet it suffered a setback in terms of parliamentary representation, with the opposition parties, namely the KMT and Taiwan People's Party (TPP). The DPP's victory marked a historic moment, representing the first time since the introduction of direct election in 1996 that a party has secured more than two consecutive presidential terms. The DPP candidate was elected president with 40% of the votes, followed by the KMT candidate with 34%, and the TPP candidate with 26% (Central Election Commission 2024).

The concurrent election of the president and the legislators mitigated the potential for a divided government, especially when the president wins more than or close to 50% of the votes. In addition, the change in the electoral formula for legislative elections, from a SNTV to a single-member district, has also been observed to increase the number of seats held by the president's party. Since 2008, both the KMT and the DPP have held the majority of seats in parliament. In such circumstances, the president's party is better positioned to exert control over both the executive and legislative branches. In essence, the system is closer to a presidential system with a unified government. Similar to the practices of numerous semi-presidential countries, in instances of a lower approval rate or policy failures, the president, who is the ultimate decision-maker behind the main policies, has the authority to replace the premier to address public discontent. Thus, due to the fixed term of the presidency, the citizenry is unable to hold the ultimate decision-maker accountable between elections.

In the 2024 parliamentary election, DPP gained 51 out of 113 seats, thereby relinquishing its majority in parliament. KMT won 52 seats, thereby becoming the majority party, while the TPP gained eight seats (Central Election Commission 2024). The KMT was successful in securing the position of speaker. In the majority of cases, the two opposition parties form a coalition. As a consequence of the election results, the new DPP government was constituted as a minority government. Given that the DPP president received only 40% of the votes, it seems unlikely that the party will secure a majority in parliament. This indicates that when the president fails to secure a majority of votes, the opposition parties may retain control of the parliament.

Three electoral institutions, those pertaining to voter eligibility and the ways to vote have an impact on electoral participation. The first one is the lowering of the voting age to 18. In 2018, individuals aged 18 and 19 are allowed to vote in national referenda. The subject under discussion is the possibility of reducing the voting age for general elections to 18 years of age. In 2022, the Legislative Yuan approved a constitutional amendment that would lower the voting age to 18. The proposal was met with overwhelming support from all parties (Strong 2022). However, the proposed amendment ultimately failed in the subsequent referendum, which took place at the end of the year, along with the city and county mayoral elections (*Taipei Times* 2022-11-28). In order for the amendment to pass in the referendum, it required the backing of at least 50 percent of all eligible voters. Despite the fact that a majority of votes were cast in favor of the amendment, it did not meet the threshold requirement of half of all eligible voters. In Taiwan, where the voting turnout in county mayoral elections is approximately 60%, a supermajority of 90% of votes cast is required for a constitutional amendment to pass. The requirement of a majority of the total number of eligible voters makes it challenging to pass the amendment. The age of majority in the Civil Code was set at 18 in

2023, creating a discrepancy whereby individuals aged 18 and 19 are required to pay tax but do not enjoy voting rights. Additionally, some supporters of the KMT may have been reluctant to vote in favor, given that younger voters typically align with the DPP.

The second issue pertains to the introduction of absentee voting, which tends to facilitate the exercise of the voting right by students, laborers, and aboriginal citizens who are not resident in their hometowns. As absentee voting is an effective method of encouraging voter participation, the Central Electoral Commission is supportive of this approach. In particular, they endorse the concept of transfer voting (移轉投票), which enables voters who are not resident in their hometown to cast their ballots in their current location. Transfer voting constitutes a component of in-person voting. A series of public hearings demonstrated that this aspect enjoys a higher degree of social consensus (Central Electoral Commission 2020). The aspect of the proposal that has been the subject of debate is the inclusion of mail-in voting (通訊投票) for Taiwanese citizens residing abroad.

In 2021, the KMT collaborated with smaller parties to propose amendments to the election law that would allow absentee voting. These amendments included options for both transfer and mail-in voting. However, the DPP obstructed this amendment, citing concerns over the potential for Chinese interference in the electoral process. The argument was made that Taiwanese citizens living in China might be subject to influence by the Chinese government, which could impinge on their capacity to exercise their right to vote freely (Pan 2021). The KMT supported the amendment, reasoning that Taiwanese citizens living in mainland China would be more inclined to support the KMT. In 2024, the DPP proposed a bill allowing absentee voting for referendums, while opposition parties called for the extension of absentee voting to include general elections.

The final issue revolves around the voting rights of Chinese spouses. In 2024, the KMT once again proposed a reduction in the residency requirement for Chinese spouses seeking citizenship, from six years to four. This would align the criteria for other foreign spouses from countries such as Malaysia, Japan, and Indonesia. Similar attempts by the Ma Ying-jeou administration in 2012 and 2016 failed to pass the parliament, reflecting a lack of social consensus on this issue. The 2024 proposal has garnered support from the TPP, while the ruling DPP has expressed opposition. The DPP argues that reducing the residency period would facilitate the acquisition of voting rights by Chinese spouses in a more expeditious manner, which has given rise to concerns pertaining to the potential risks to Taiwan's democracy and national security. They point to allegations of Chinese government infiltration of democratic institutions in countries such as Australia and Canada, and express fears that Chinese spouses with limited exposure to democratic principles may align with the authoritarian regime in Mainland China, potentially acting as a "Trojan horse" to undermine Taiwan's democracy from within. Those in favor of the amendment contend that denying Chinese spouses equal voting rights could engender sentiments of unfair treatment and alienation, which might ultimately result in a diminution of their support for democracy and a weakening of their sense of identification with Taiwan.

3. V-Dem Score and Asian Barometer

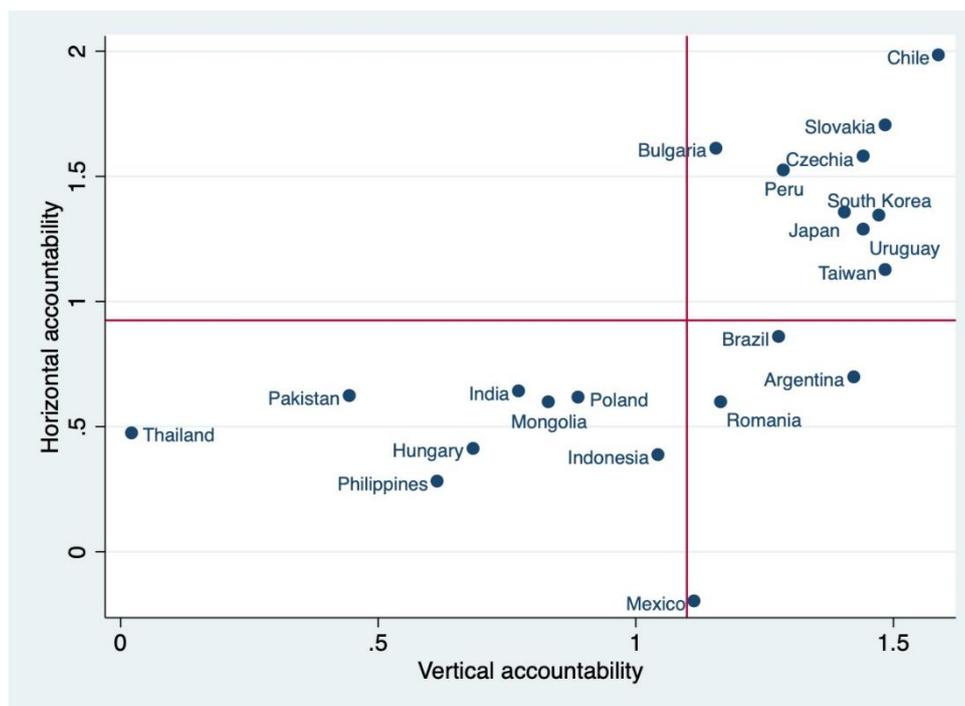
In V-Dem, vertical accountability is comprised of three essential components. The initial aspect concerns the quality of elections, which involves an overall evaluation of the integrity, fairness, and transparency of the electoral procedures. The subsequent element pertains to the percentage of the eligible population that participates in the electoral process. This component assesses the inclusiveness of the democratic system

by considering the proportion of individuals with voting rights who exercise them. The third aspect assesses the method used to select the chief executive, specifically whether this is achieved through a direct or indirect approach.

It is pertinent to conduct a comparative analysis of Taiwan's performance in the context of countries currently undergoing the third wave of democratization like Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as in comparison to established Asian democracies, including Japan and India. By comparing Taiwan's performance in these aspects to that of other nations, we can gain a more nuanced comprehension of the advancements it has made in democracy. The present study employs data from the year 2021 to demonstrate the aforementioned pattern. The graph below provides a visual representation of these comparisons, revealing Taiwan's strengths in vertical and horizontal accountability.

As seen from Figure 1, Taiwan exhibits a notably high level of vertical accountability, indicating the efficacy of electoral processes and party competition. In terms of vertical accountability, Taiwan's performance is superior to that of the majority of emerging and East Asian democratic countries. The high scores can be attributed to three factors.

Figure 1. Horizontal Accountability and Vertical Accountability



Firstly, the election in Taiwan is perceived to be fair and transparent. The electoral commission, which is responsible for delineating electoral districts and administering elections, is largely autonomous. Furthermore, the judiciary in Taiwan operates with a high degree of autonomy, with court regulations largely insulated from political or inappropriate influences. The courts, which frequently adjudicate cases pertaining to vote buying, defamation, and violations of election law, are not partisan in their decision-making. Secondly, Taiwan has an automatic registration system, whereby all citizens residing in Taiwan are automatically sent election notification letters several days prior to the election. This allows them to cast their ballots in a voting booth located within walking distance of their residence. The election date is typically set for a Saturday. Therefore, the cost of voting is minimal. Thirdly, the President and members of

parliament are directly elected by the Taiwanese people. Subsequently, the president is responsible for nominating the prime minister and has the authority to dismiss them at their discretion.

The concept of horizontal accountability pertains to the maintenance of a system of checks and balances among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. In comparison to other newly established democracies, Taiwan’s performance in horizontal accountability is approximately moderate. However, compared to South Korea, and several Latin American countries, its scores are relatively lower. The absence of robust horizontal and diagonal accountability mechanisms may result in the deterioration of a democracy into an electoral democracy. Fortunately, the judicial system in Taiwan is characterized by a notable degree of independence. This aligns with the general perception that Taiwan’s judicial system has become relatively independent following democratization and is not unduly influenced by the executive branch.

Diagonal accountability refers to the oversight exerted by citizens, social groups, and the media on government actions that fall outside the purview of the representative political system (Malena et al. 2004). This mechanism ensures that government actions and decisions are subject to scrutiny by civil society, thereby promoting transparency and preventing the misuse of power.

The concept of diagonal accountability encompasses a range of actions and mechanisms that can be employed by citizens, civil society organizations, and an independent media to ensure governmental accountability. The measurement in V-Dem includes four aspects: media freedom, civil society characteristics, freedom of expression, and the extent of citizen engagement in political affairs. As illustrated in Figure 2, Taiwan exhibits a comparable level of performance in diagonal accountability to that observed in vertical accountability. The high performance of diagonal accountability in Taiwan denotes the capacity and active participation of civil society organizations, which contribute to the strengthening of vertical accountability. In the case that the government seeks to weaken vertical accountability, mass media and civil society organizations can collaborate to prevent the government from making wrong decisions.

Figure 2. Vertical Accountability and Diagonal Accountability

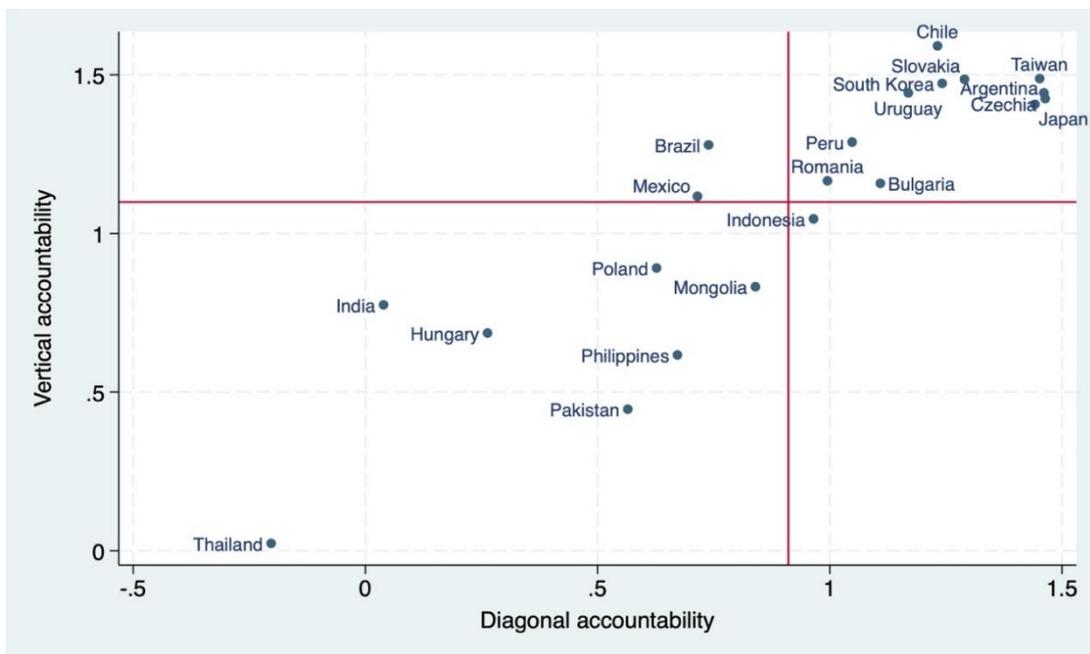
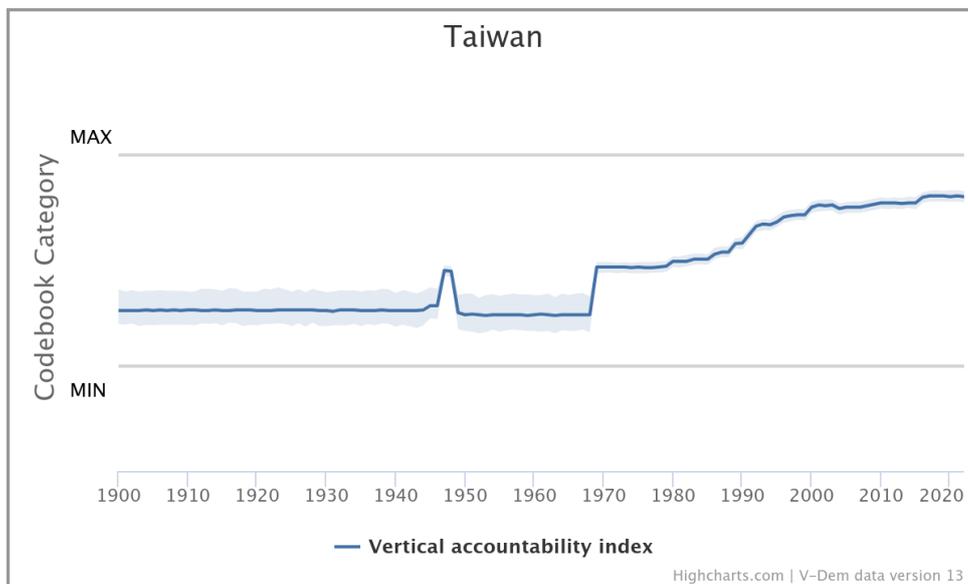


Figure 3 depicts the change of Taiwan’s vertical accountability index. Following the Second World War, Taiwan’s score was relatively low due to the implementation of martial law and the holding of regular elections only at the county level. The data clearly illustrate a significant upswing in Taiwan’s horizontal accountability score in the late 1960s, coinciding with the gradual expansion of elected members of parliament. In the early 1990s, a further notable increase was observed, along with the country’s transition to democracy. Notably, this score has exhibited a commendable level of stability since that time. Taiwan’s remarkable increase and stability in vertical accountability since its democratic transition in the early 1990s, as depicted in the graph, underscores the country’s commitment to democratic principles.

Figure 3. Vertical Accountability Index in Taiwan, 1900-2023



4. Election Participation

As illustrated in Table 1, the voter turnout for presidential and legislative elections in Taiwan has exhibited a consistently high level of participation, with over 70% of the eligible population casting their ballots in most elections. In 2016, however, due to a significant poll gap between the two leading candidates, voter turnout declined to 66%. Following the 2008 electoral reform, the presidential and parliamentary elections are held concurrently. Consequently, the voter turnout for these two elections is almost identical. Therefore, we limit our analysis to the presidential election turnout.

Table 1. Political Participation (2008-2024)

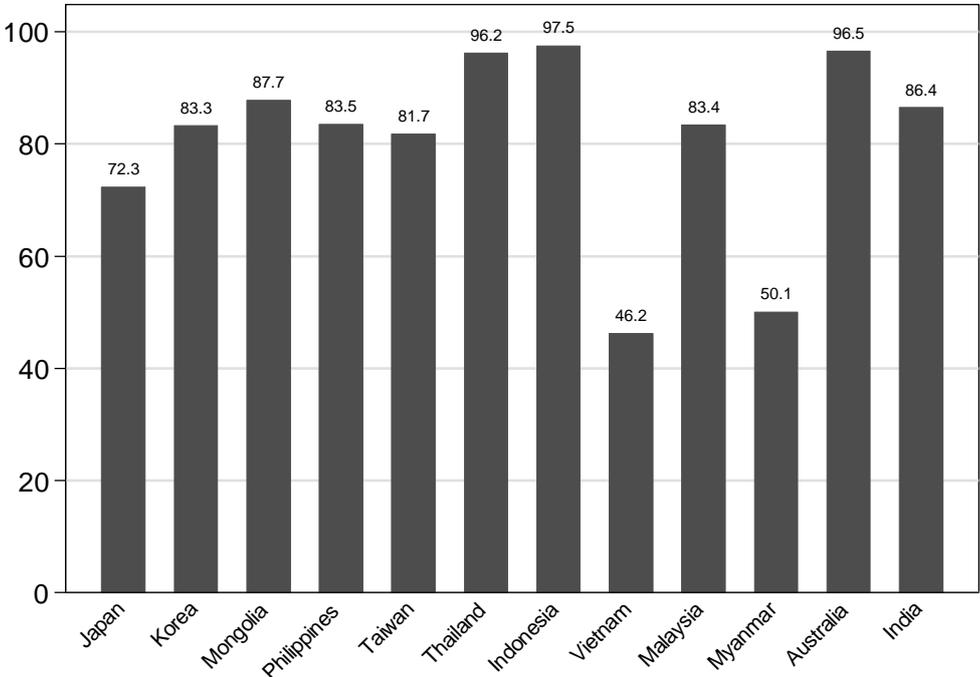
	President election turnout	percentage of candidates below 40	percentage of male candidates	percentage of female candidates
2008	76%	19%	71%	29%
2012	74%	12%	68%	32%
2016	66%	18%	66%	34%
2020	75%	19%	62%	38%
2024	72%	17%	59%	41%

Source: Central Election Commission

Table 1 also shows the age and gender distribution of parliamentary candidates across years. It can be observed that the rate of youth participation has not increased significantly, remaining below 20%. This means that candidates under 40 years of age constitute less than 20% of all candidates, which is not proportionate to the proportion of young people. With regard to the gender difference, while male candidate participation remains relatively high, female participation has been increasing across years, from 29% in 2008 to 41% in 2024, denoting the rising female participation in politics.

Furthermore, the election participation rate of young voters and gender groups can be examined. In order to facilitate a comparative analysis of electoral participation in Taiwan with that in other Asian countries, we utilize the fifth wave of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS). First, we use the following question: “Thinking of whether you voted or not ever since you became eligible for voting, how would you describe yourself – have you voted in every election, voted in most elections, voted in some elections or hardly ever voted?” This was done in order to capture political participation. The respondents who indicated that they had voted in every election and in most elections were classified as frequent voters, while those who responded that they had voted in some elections and had hardly ever voted were classified as infrequent voters. As can be seen from Figure 4, more than eighty percent of respondents reply that they are frequent voters. The electoral participation rate in Taiwan is not significantly higher than that observed in most other democracies in the Indo-Asia region. Only Thailand, Indonesia, and Australia exhibit significantly higher rates of electoral participation. The response to this question is inherently susceptible to social desirability bias, which presents a significant challenge in cross-country comparisons.

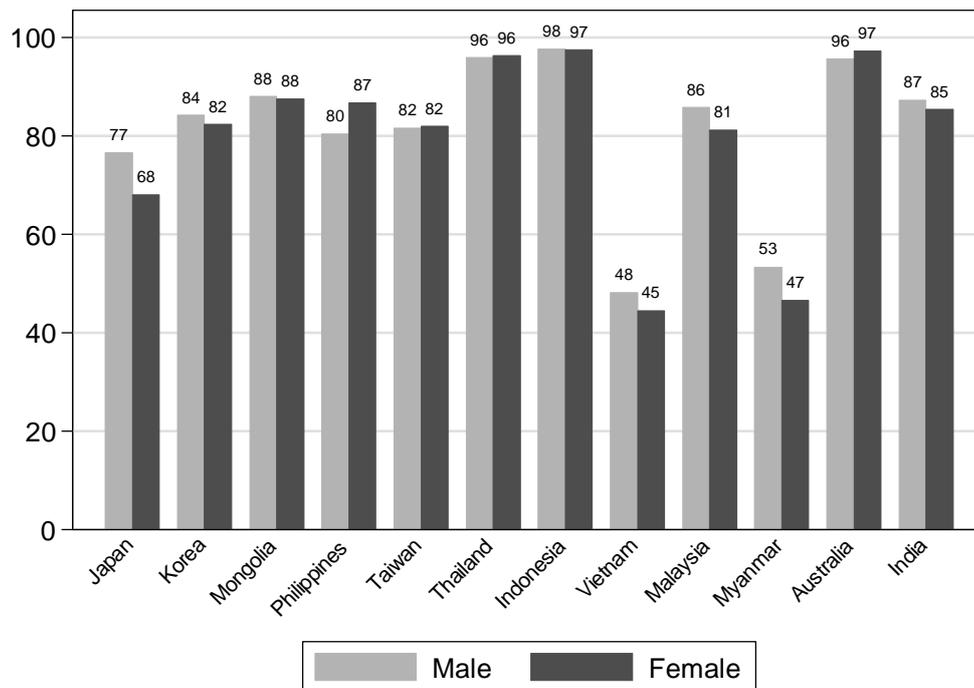
Figure 4. Election Participation Rate



Unit: percentage; Data Source: Asian Barometer Wave 5

The subsequent section examines the election participation rate, disaggregated by gender. As seen from Figure 5, the voting rate is approximately equivalent between male and female voters in Taiwan. In certain countries, such as Japan, Korea, and Malaysia, male citizens exhibit a higher turnout. In the Philippines, however, women have a higher election participation rate than men.

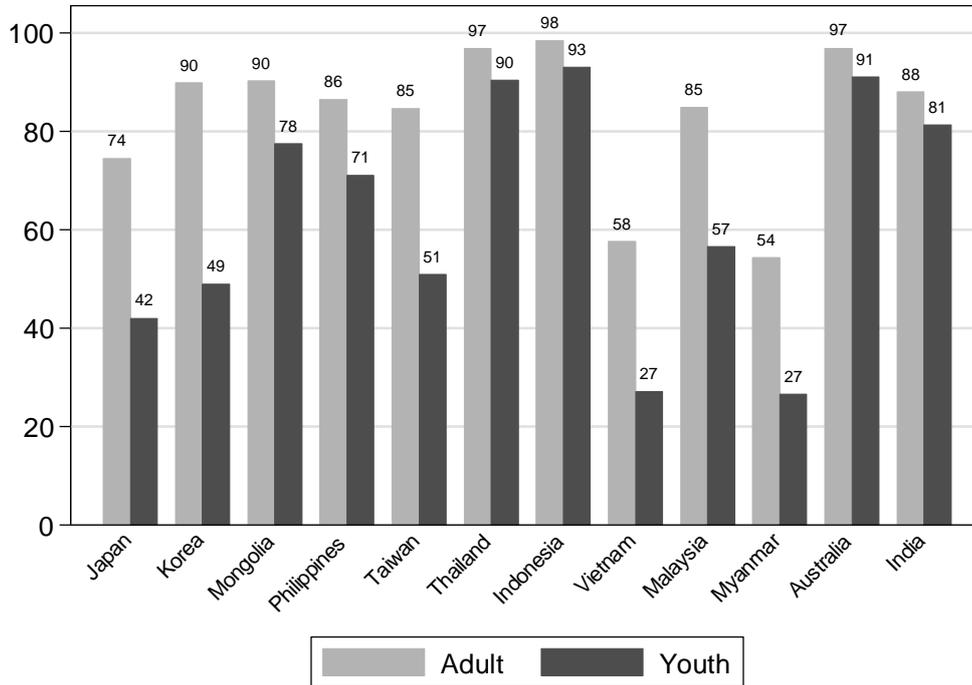
Figure 5. Election Participation Rate by Gender



Unit: percentage; Data Source: Asian Barometer Wave 5

Next, we look at the election participation rate, breakdown by age groups, as shown in Figure 6. The voting rate is considerably lower among young voters below the age of 40 in Taiwan. In the majority of countries within this region, young citizens are considerably less likely to be frequent voters. The discrepancy between the voting rates of young and adult citizens can reach 30 to 40 percentage points in countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Malaysia. In contrast, in some countries, such as Thailand, Indonesia, Australia, and India, the election participation rate gaps are much smaller between age groups.

Figure 6. Election Participation Rate by Age



Unit: percentage; Data Source: Asian Barometer Wave 5

5. Issues Debated in Elections

In the recent general elections, the main candidates focused primarily on issues related to national defense, security, and sovereignty, with limited discussion on other public policy issues. The issue of sovereignty is largely rooted in political identity and can be employed as a means of consolidating support from core supporters in an effective manner. Conversely, a number of significant socio-economic concerns in Taiwan, including the potential insolvency of the labor pension scheme, severe demographic challenges, global warming, labor shortages, and the fiscal costs of energy subsidies, have not been subjected to sufficient scrutiny and debate. Instead, the three candidates and the media have primarily focused on discrediting their opponents based on minor flaws in their real estate holdings.

For example, in the 2024 presidential election, the three principal candidates did sparsely propose certain policies pertaining to these critical issues. However, there has been a lack of comprehensive discourse and sufficient public attention. Moreover, the three candidates frequently eschew addressing the fundamental causes of these issues by proposing measures that could potentially disadvantage specific groups. For example, concerning the mounting deficits in the labor pension scheme, all three candidates refrain from contemplating the potential of augmenting the contributions of laborers. In lieu of proposing alternative solutions, the candidates have pledged to maintain the current approach of relying on government funding to address the pension fund deficits.

With regard to their respective election platforms and campaign trails, the three sets of candidates demonstrate no discernible differences in their policy positions on a range of socio-economic issues, including industrial, labor, education, housing, and health policies. Political parties are generally aware of the appropriate policies beneficial to society as a whole; however, they often prioritize those that will not

jeopardize their chances of winning elections. With regard to the energy issue, the KMT and TPP support the continued utilization of nuclear energy, whereas the DPP advocates for its immediate phase-out. The most notable divergence in political positions among candidates lies in cross-strait relationships.

Regarding cross-strait relations, the candidates all advocate for a close Taiwan-American alliance, increasing Taiwan's defense deterrence, and engagement in dialogue with the mainland on the basis of equality and dignity. The U.S. academic and media anticipated that the election of any of the three candidates will not result in any significant alterations to the U.S.-China-Taiwan relationship. All candidates have visited the United States, met with scholars from universities and think tanks, and held discussions with American officials, ensuring a clear understanding of their positions on the relationships.

However, the concepts of "equality and dignity" are interpreted differently by the three parties. Hou You-yi accepts a "One China with Different Interpretations" framework, which encompasses both the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China. Additionally, he is opposed to Taiwanese independence and has cautioned against the risk of war. Similarly to his predecessors, Lai Ching-te does not accept the "One China" policy, stating that it is equivalent to "one country, two systems." The KMT has accused Lai Ching-te of pro-Taiwan independence and of inciting military conflicts. In turn, Lai Ching-te has characterized the KMT's policy as tantamount to surrender. Ko Wen-je's stance is more ambiguous. Additionally, in terms of cross-strait economic relations, Lai Ching-te emphasizes the strong linkage between economic and national security. It would be prudent for Taiwan to reduce its reliance on the Chinese market while simultaneously seeking to strengthen its economic ties with its democratic allies. In contrast, the KMT advocates for the establishment of more robust economic ties with mainland China.

In comparison to previous candidates from the KMT, Hou demonstrates a notable shift towards a more robust emphasis on democracy and Taiwan's sovereignty, accompanied by a discernible expression of skepticism towards the Beijing government. They advocate a diplomatic policy for Taiwan that is pro-American, friendly with Japan, and engaging with China. The DPP's policy is characterized by a pro-American, pro-Japanese, and anti-communist China stance.

In recent years, candidates have frequently elevated the stakes of general elections to a level where the outcome has been seen as a choice between the survival of democracy, the preservation of sovereignty, or the future of the country. Against the backdrop of China's rising threat of force over Taiwan, the ruling party seized the opportunity to exploit the perceived threat. During the election campaign, the DPP candidate cast himself as the defender of Taiwan's sovereignty, claiming that if the opposition candidate was elected, Taiwan would be forced to surrender to China, democracy would collapse, and Taiwan's sovereignty would be weakened. In response to a multitude of criticisms levied against its domestic policies, the DPP has sought to deflect attention by attributing the blame to China, such as the dissemination of misinformation. The victory of the DPP in this election is undoubtedly influenced by the ongoing threat from China, coupled with the ruling party's exploitation of the existential threats. However, the DPP garnered merely 40% of the vote, suggesting that the rhetoric of existential threat may not resonate profoundly with the majority of Taiwanese voters. Some voters may prefer more dialogues with mainland China, thereby reducing the potential for miscalculation and the risk of military confrontation.

On the other side, the KMT also leveraged the China threat by framing the election as a choice between war and peace. They asserted that the pro-Taiwan independence stance and confrontational approach of Lai would contribute to the escalation of conflict, forcing young people to go to the battlefield. Lai has repeatedly stated that he has no intention of modifying the official name of the Republic of China or amending the constitution.

The strategic elevation of the election's significance, which enables governments to justify violations of democratic norms, is a common phenomenon in many countries, including the United States and South Korea. A common characteristic of these nations is the high level of political polarization. Both parties exhibit profound skepticism and low levels of trust in one another. Political leaders are motivated to exploit this polarization during elections by framing the electoral outcome as an existential threat to the country, democracy, ethnic groups, or social classes.

Two factors set Taiwan apart from these countries. Firstly, the primary issue in dispute—national identity—exists beyond the scope of democratic institutions. The resolution of questions pertaining to a nation's boundaries and identities through democratic processes is inherently challenging. Fortunately, despite the intense competition and conflict over national identity, social cleavages in other areas, such as class and religion, are relatively minor. This allows the two major parties to resolve disputes over socioeconomic issues, thereby reducing the potential for threats to democratic processes, as overlapping social divisions often present a greater risk to democratic stability.

Secondly, unlike certain other countries, the polarization observed in Taiwan is not closely associated with populist movements. The influence of populist leaders in Taiwan is not as pronounced as it is in other democracies like the United States. These populist leaders, who achieved a degree of popularity between 2010 and 2020, have not ascended to positions of national leadership and have gradually receded from the political forefront. Furthermore, Taiwan's two major political parties have largely eschewed populist tendencies. There is no evidence that any prominent political leaders have rejected democratic norms or challenged the results of elections. Despite the fact that both parties have exploited external threats, which to some extent erode democratic quality, they continue to uphold the fundamental structures of vertical and horizontal accountability. Additionally, despite the continued divergence of civil society on matters of national identity, there is no discernible support for the ruling party's transgression of democratic principles.

6. Potentially Threatening to Vertical Accountability

The external threats to Taiwan's liberal democracy originate directly from China. Additionally, it is attempting to leverage its political and economic influence to shape public opinion and influence the policies of political parties in Taiwan. The dissemination of misinformation represents one of numerous strategies that China is utilizing to exert influence over Taiwan. One objective is to exert influence over the competition between political parties in Taiwan. Such narratives tend to denigrate the performance of the DPP government, impugning its ability to maintain peace in the Taiwan Strait. This strategy aims to diminish the approval rating of the ruling party and boost support for the opposition parties that are more amenable to China's policies. Such actions have the effect of distorting the competitive landscape between political parties.

Conversely, in recent years, China has provided financial support to individual politicians with the objective of assisting candidates and political parties that are aligned with China's interests in winning presidential elections. Subsequently, several of them have been subjected to investigation and prosecution. The scope of these activities is, in general, quite limited and does not extend to the mainstream political parties.

The second threat arises from the potential for supposedly neutral government agencies to intervene for political gain. By strategically emphasizing the significance of the election, the government provides itself with a rationale for its actions. Such circumstances have the potential to compromise the fairness of the electoral process and erode public confidence in the democratic process. For example, in the days preceding the election, China launched a satellite that passed over Taiwanese airspace. The Defense

Ministry issued an air raid alert, stating that it was a Chinese missile test (*Central News Agency* 2024-01-09). The dissemination of misinformation contributed to an increased perception of national security threats and potentially enhanced support for the ruling party. The government has also intervened more frequently in the electoral process by instructing law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute political opponents and citizens for disseminating false information and aiding China's infiltration before the election. In recent years, Taiwan has passed the Social Order Maintenance Act to tackle fake news and the Anti-Infiltration Act to counter Chinese influence in elections and politics.

While China is known for engaging in cognitive warfare and infiltration, the DPP also exploited this threat. In the context of fake news, the act of criticizing the government or commenting on government policies may be perceived as cognitive warfare, which could result in legal consequences and a chilling effect on free speech (Wu 2023). Additionally, the Ministry of Justice proposed more rigorous examination of new immigrants from China to counter foreign influence, sparking controversy due to its targeted focus on a specific group.

The second issue concerns the willingness to abide by the fundamental rules. Such actions are not exclusive to a particular political party. The acceptance of the result of democratic competition represents a fundamental tenet of democratic governance. Taiwan has undergone eight presidential elections and several party turnovers. Taiwan has successfully surpassed the two-turnover test of democratic consolidation proposed by Samuel Huntington. However, there have been instances where candidates have not adhered to the established regulations during the primary phase. While this phenomenon is most prevalent at the local primary level, it has been manifested in this electoral cycle as well. During the DPP primary, Tsai Ing-wen postponed the primary and modified the electoral rules on multiple occasions following a decline in her poll ratings due to a challenge from her former premier. Subsequently, she was able to reclaim her victory following Xi Jinping's speech, which prompted Taiwanese citizens to rally behind her. Concurrently, Terry Kuo, the chair of Foxconn, who participated in the primary as the KMT candidate, similarly declined to endorse the winner of the election after placing second in 2020 and again in 2024.

The third issue pertains to the increasing prevalence of recall elections. A recall election is a mechanism by which voters may remove an elected official whose performance is deemed unsatisfactory. However, there is a growing trend of retaliatory recall campaigns targeting opponents that are initiated by supporters with a strong ideological opposition to those opponents. It is anticipated that the success of a recall vote will have a cascade effect, leading to the removal of additional elected officials who are perceived as opponents. This phenomenon occurs within the context of robust partisan antagonism. In addition, this phenomenon can be attributed to alterations in recall election law. In 2016, the DPP enacted a law that reduced the popular vote threshold required to remove an elected official. Previously, the requirement was that more than half of the total number of voters in a district actually vote, and that there be an absolute majority of voters in favor of the measure. Following the amendment, the number of affirmative votes must first exceed the number of negative votes and also exceed one-quarter of the total number of voters in the district.² The threshold for the final stage is a highly contentious issue. The low quorum for a recall vote may induce legislators to disregard party discipline to pass controversial reform bills. In democracies, a strong party discipline is an essential element that enables the ruling party to effectively govern.

² The threshold for recall elections changes in different stages. In the proposal stage, the number of proposers exceed 1% of the total number of voters in the electoral district to proceed. In the signature collection stage, the number of signatures must exceed least 10% of the total voters to proceed.

The relatively low voter turnout in recall elections allows those with strong opinions to exert disproportionate influence on the results. Additionally, a comparison of the recall election requirements—set at a quarter of the total electorate—with those for electing officials reveals inconsistencies. County mayors and legislators, elected via the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, are subject to lower thresholds for removal than those applicable to their election. In contrast, the majority of local councilors, elected through a single non-transferable vote in a multi-member district (SNTV), face recall thresholds that are higher than those required for their election. In general, excessively high thresholds can render the recall system ineffective, whereas thresholds that are too low may permit a minority to remove a politician who does not face majority opposition. This contravenes democratic principles and impedes elected politicians' capacity to govern or supervise the government (Lou 2021). This also precludes elected politicians from effectively governing or overseeing the government. The misuse of recall elections tends to exacerbate political conflict and result in considerable social costs.

7. Direct Democracy and Its Problems

Because of the alleged failure of representative democracy to address the needs of the people, the New Power Party (NPP) also promotes direct democracy. In 2018, the NPP and the DPP government proposed amendments to the Referendum Act, lowering the threshold of eligible voters required to initiate a referendum proposal (from 0.5 percent to 0.01 percent) and the threshold required to put a referendum proposal to a vote (from 5 percent to 1.5 percent). Furthermore, the amendments reduced the quorum required to pass a proposal. Before the amendment, it was necessary for at least 50 percent of the electorate to cast ballots, with an absolute relative majority of valid votes being required. The current legislation requires that at least 25 percent of the electorate cast ballots and that a relative majority of valid votes be cast. Furthermore, the recently enacted legislation has eliminated the necessity for a review committee, which was previously empowered to reject a referendum proposal. As a direct consequence of the alteration to the quorum, the number of citizen initiatives has mushroomed significantly. In the 2018 municipal and county elections, ten referendum proposals were put to a vote, encompassing a range of issues including same-sex marriage, nuclear power, and air pollution, as well as changing the name used for Olympic and international competitions from Chinese Taipei to Taiwan.

In its review of the referendum law, the NPP proposed an extension to include the possibility of deciding constitutional clauses by referendum. One of the most important issues is the designation of the nation's official title and territory. These are particularly contentious issues, given Taiwan's unique position within the global power structure. The NPP also proposed amending the law to require that any cross-strait political negotiations be subjected to a referendum prior to their commencement. The term "political negotiations" is quite vague. Following the Sunflower Movement, the implications of trade agreements have also become a matter of significant political and national security concern. Ultimately, these two proposals were rejected by other major political parties.

As a consequence of the recent amendment to the referendum law, which reduced the quorum requirement, ten referendum cases were put to a vote in the 2018 local elections. The sheer number of cases is overwhelming for the public to understand, digest, and ultimately make informed decisions about. Furthermore, the proposal, deliberation, and voting processes for such cases are conducted within a relatively short timeframe of just two months. The current practice of direct democracy does not allow thorough social deliberation that can be found in some mature democracies. Taiwan is a society that is divided along national

identity lines and in its views of cross-strait political and economic relationships. The format of a referendum often presents a binary choice, which may limit the potential for compromise. In the case of identity-related issues, it would be preferable to engage in deliberation and pursue compromise within the framework of representative institutions.

In 2020, following two years of amendments to the Referendum Act, the DPP government determined that the implementation of multiple referendums proposed by opposition parties during the election could potentially have a detrimental impact on its electoral prospects as the incumbent ruling party. The opposition capitalizes on this opportunity to propose numerous bills that mobilize supporters. As a result, the ruling party has decided to amend the referendum law once more. The objective of the new legislation is to restrict the influence of referendums on presidential elections by establishing a fixed date for their conduct, which is to be set apart from that of the presidential elections. The referendum is scheduled to be held on the fourth Saturday of August, on an annual basis commencing in 2021. As the referendum elections are not held concurrently with the presidential elections, the turnout rates are approximately 41%, which is almost 30% point lower than that of the presidential elections.

A low turnout rate directly affects the probability of a referendum measure being adopted. Regarding the threshold for the passage of a referendum, it requires the number of affirmative votes to exceed the number of negative votes and also to exceed one-quarter of the total number of eligible voters. For example, the four referendums held in 2021, as documented by the Central Election Commission, encompassed 19,825,468 eligible voters. Consequently, the number of affirmative votes required to exceed $19,825,468/4 = 4,956,367$ votes (*Central News Agency* 2021-11-14). In the 2021 referendums, none of the four proposals met the one-fourth threshold, and the number of votes cast in opposition to the proposals exceeded the number of votes cast in favor of the proposals in all cases, resulting in the failure of all four referendums.

8. The Confrontational Politics Behind Delays in Legislation

In recent years, political parties and politicians have increasingly framed general elections as critical turning points for Taiwan. This framing positions the elections as pivotal moments that could fundamentally impact the nation's democracy, sovereignty, and overall stability. This perception of high stakes intensifies the pressure on political actors to achieve victory, frequently leading them to prioritize electoral success over strict adherence to democratic norms and practices. The heightened sense of urgency often motivates both major political parties, particularly the ruling party, and their supporters to pursue strategies that may sidestep or even violate established democratic procedures. Such actions not only compromise the integrity of these organizations but also erode public trust in the political process.

Over the past few years, there have been instances where political actors have attempted to exert influence over non-political organizations, including prosecutors, courts, the military, and the police, with the aim of intimidating their opponents and influencing public opinion. By strategically elevating the significance of the election, the government provides itself with a rationale for its actions. This situation has the effect of undermining the level playing field. For example, in the days preceding the election, China launched a satellite that passed over Taiwan at a considerable altitude. The Defense Ministry issued an air raid alert, stating that the missile test was conducted by China (*Central News Agency* 2024-01-09). The dissemination of misinformation contributed to an increased perception of national security threats and potentially enhanced support for the ruling party. A further strategy employed by the government is to direct prosecutors to investigate and prosecute political opponents for alleged misconduct both before and after

elections. Conversely, they avoid taking such actions against political allies for similar misconduct. This is intended to secure electoral victory.

In recent years, Taiwan has enacted two significant pieces of legislation: the Social Order Maintenance Act, which addresses the issue of fake news, and the Anti-Infiltration Act, which aims to counter Chinese influence in elections and politics. While China is known for engaging in cognitive warfare and infiltration, the DPP also exploited this threat. In the context of fake news, the act of criticizing the government or commenting on government policies may sometimes be perceived as cognitive warfare, leading to potential legal ramifications and a deterrent effect (Wu 2023). Additionally, the Ministry of Justice proposed more rigorous examination of recent immigrants from China to counteract foreign influence, sparking controversy due to its targeted focus on a specific group.

In the context of divided government, confrontational politics assume a more prominent position. After the general election in 2024, the formation of a divided government and the narrowing of the seat margin in parliament make it unclear about which party was granted a mandate to determine the policy direction. The two main opposition parties, particularly the KMT, have sought to advance their own policy objectives, in many cases driven by political and special interests. In addition, given the weak presidential veto power, the DPP has often resorted to using filibusters to block bills proposed by opposition parties. This situation has resulted in brawls in the Legislative Yuan and a notable delay in the progress of several significant socioeconomic bills, leading to a reduction in the number of bills passed during the initial legislative session after the general election in comparison to previous sessions (*Formosa News* 2024-07-18). In addition to legislative bills, the DPP government seems to be disinclined to engage in power-sharing arrangements regarding the composition of independent government organizations and committees.

Upon his election as president in 2000, President Chen Shui-bian was confronted with the same minority government. He took the initiative to visit the KMT Speaker and the KMT caucus in parliament to secure their support for the legislative bills. President Lai is reluctant to pursue a similar course of action. In lieu of this, the KMT Speaker of the Legislative Yuan extended an invitation to the Premier and the whips of all parties for a dinner meeting with the objective of seeking political reconciliation. However, the absence of mutual compromise on the important bills persists. This illustrates that, under the prevailing electoral system, instances of divided government remain a distinct possibility. The capacity to foster compromise and achieve results hinges on the disposition of political leaders. As of now, this remains a far-off dream.

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