

# Measuring and Explaining the Electoral Fortunes of Small Parties in Taiwan's Party Politics

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*Over the last two and a half decades the Kuomintang and Democratic Progressive Party have dominated Taiwan's party system. From 2008-2012 they were the only parties represented in the Legislative Yuan. Nevertheless, there have been periods in which other parties have had a significant impact on the party system. These parties have received considerable media attention during and between campaigns, won significant numbers of parliamentary and local assembly seats, and affected the Taiwanese political agenda. In this paper I assess the impact of these small parties on the party system and offer some explanations for their electoral successes and failures over the last decade.*

**KEYWORDS:** Taiwan; new parties; small parties; political parties; elections.

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In 1986 when Taiwan was still under martial law, the then illegal Democratic Progressive Party (民進黨, DPP) challenged the ruling Kuomintang (國民黨, KMT) in that year's National

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Assembly election. The election was pitting a tiny party only a few months old against a party that had been ruling Taiwan as a one party state for four decades and even today ranks among the richest in the world. In 1986 these two parties dominated the vote and seat shares in what was arguably Taiwan's first multi-party election. Over two and a half decades later the same two parties remained dominant in the most recent national parliamentary election in 2012, winning over 90 percent of the seats between them. Therefore the party system has been much more stable than in many other Asian democracies, such as South Korea or Japan, which have seen significant changes in their main parties over the last two decades. Given this dominance it is not surprising that most of the literature on Taiwanese political parties has focused on the KMT and DPP.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, there have been periods in which other smaller challenger parties have had an impact on the party system. These parties have received considerable media attention during and between campaigns, have at times won significant numbers of parliamentary and local assembly seats, and have affected the Taiwanese political agenda. In this paper I track the electoral fortunes of these small parties and offer some explanations for their electoral successes and failures over the last decade.

The literature on smaller parties in Taiwan has been quite limited. Christian Schafferer and John Copper both conducted studies on the impact of small parties in the initial periods of multi-party politics from the late 1980s through to the mid 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Later Dafydd Fell analyzed the period through to 2004 when small parties reached their peak levels of

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<sup>1</sup>For discussions on party system change in Taiwan see Ching-hsin Yu, "The Evolution of Party System in Taiwan, 1995-2004," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 40, no. 1-2 (April 2005): 105-29; Dafydd Fell, "Interparty Competition in Taiwan: Towards a New Party System," in *Presidential Politics in Taiwan*, ed. Steven Goldstein and Julian Chang (Norwalk, Conn.: Eastbridge, 2008), 49-84; Chiung-chu Lin, "The Evolution of Party Images and Party System in Taiwan, 1992-2004," *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2006): 27-46.

<sup>2</sup>Christian Schafferer, *The Power of the Ballot Box: Political Development and Election Campaigning in Taiwan* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2003); John F. Copper, "The Role of Minor Political Parties in Taiwan," *World Affairs* 155, no. 3 (Winter 1993): 95-110.

parliamentary seats.<sup>3</sup> He also conducted an examination of the rise and fall of the first significant third party, the New Party (新黨, NP).<sup>4</sup>

This study attempts to track the changing influence of the challenger parties since 2004 and to test whether earlier explanatory frameworks are also valid in explaining their success and failure over the last decade. The next two sections discuss the debates over which labels are most appropriate for the non-mainstream political parties and which such parties are worthy of analysis in the Taiwan case. The fourth section reviews the key phases in the development of smaller parties since the lifting of martial law. This is followed by a discussion of the main approaches to explaining small party success in the literature on comparative politics and Taiwan. Then the main analytical part of the paper considers the best theoretical approaches to explain the changing fortunes of Taiwanese smaller parties. Since there are a number of publications looking at small parties up to 2004, my analysis focuses on explaining their development over the last decade.

### **Terminology for Non-mainstream Parties**

An initial challenge in the study of parties taking on the mainstream parties is what to call them. One option is to call these challengers new parties, in that they were officially registered after the first multi-party election of 1986. One problem is that many of these parties are no longer new. For instance, the New Party (NP) celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2013. In addition, there is much room for confusion as the NP has been

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<sup>3</sup>Dafydd Fell, "Success and Failure of New Parties in Taiwan," *China: An International Journal* 3, no. 2 (September 2005): 212-39.

<sup>4</sup>Dafydd Fell, "The Rise and Decline of the New Party: Ideology, Resources and the Political Opportunity Structure," *East Asia* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 47-67. The NP has attracted far more attention than the newer parties in the post 2000 period. For instance, at least five books were published on the NP in the 1990s, compared to none specifically on the TSU or PFP. An example of these books on the NP is Chien Ta, *Huangqi mengsui* (Yellow flag, broken dreams) (Taipei: Business Weekly).

one of the most influential new parties in Taiwan. Another popular concept is to label them niche parties. For Bonnie Meguid this refers to parties that concentrate their appeal on new issue areas that are not part of the traditional economic left-right spectrum, while for others the distinction is based purely on party ideology.<sup>5</sup> Thus for some authors communist, ecological or regional nationalist parties would be viewed as niche parties.<sup>6</sup> However, neither variation of the niche party is especially useful in the Taiwan case, as the European left-right divide does not translate well into Taiwanese party politics, the Green Party Taiwan (台灣綠黨, GP) has had only a marginal influence so far, and the issue focus of the new parties has often overlapped with those of the mainstream parties. In fact, at its peak, the NP attempted to present a very broad programmatic appeal, being the first party to issue manifesto style newspaper ads ahead of the two mainstream parties.<sup>7</sup> The term I have used in this paper is small parties, a label that Spoon adopts in her analysis of the survival of West European Green parties.<sup>8</sup> This label fits quite well for the vast majority of challenger parties in the Taiwan case. However, for a number of years both the NP and People First Party (親民黨, PFP) at their peak could have been categorized as medium-sized parties in terms of their levels of party identification and parliamentary seats.

A useful distinction that can be made in the study of non-mainstream parties considers whether they focus on a set of new policy issues or concentrate on being more orthodox on core issue areas being neglected by a mainstream party. Paul Lucardie suggests we can term the former prophetic parties, while Thomas Rochan calls the new issue parties, such

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<sup>5</sup>Bonnie Meguid, *Party Competition between Unequals: Strategies and Electoral Fortunes in Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup>James Adams et al., "Are Niche Parties Fundamentally Different from Mainstream Parties? The Causes and the Electoral Consequences of Western European Parties' Policy Shifts, 1976-1998," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 3 (July 2006): 513-29.

<sup>7</sup>See NP ad, *Lianhe bao* (United Daily) (Taipei), November 18, 1995, 32.

<sup>8</sup>Jae-Jae Spoon, *Political Survival of Small Parties in West Europe* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

as environmental parties, mobilizers.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, Lucardie terms the parties that appeal on traditional issue areas (especially on the left-right dimension) purifiers, something that Rochan calls challengers.<sup>10</sup> Since the traditional core issue spectrum in Taiwan concerns the question of national identity, the best examples of purifiers have been the numerous splinter parties (such as the NP) that have broken away from the KMT or DPP since the mid 1990s. A third category suggested by Lucardie is personal vehicles that are based principally on the appeal of their party founder or leader. In Taiwan's case a number of the newer parties have been so dominated by a single figure that they verge on inclusion in this category. The most obvious cases are Chu Kao-cheng's (朱高正) role in the Chinese Social Democratic Party (中華社民黨, CSDP) and James Soong (宋楚瑜) in the PFP. A final variation on Lucardie's framework is a category Allan Sikk terms "purifiers light" or "projects of newness."<sup>11</sup> These are parties that focus on a similar range of issues to established parties, are less ideologically motivated than purifiers, and as Sikk notes they do "not stand for much more than newness."<sup>12</sup> While Sikk pinpoints a number of Baltic State parties as falling into this project of newness type, it does also seem applicable to Taiwan's PFP.

### **Which Parties to Analyse?**

The next challenge then is which parties deserve attention? Here the existing literature again shows divergence in approaches. One option would be to concentrate just on niche parties which stress new issues such

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<sup>9</sup>Paul Lucardie, "Prophets, Purifiers and Prolocutors: Towards a Theory on the Emergence of New Parties," *Party Politics* 6, no. 2 (2000): 175-85; Thomas Rochan, "Mobilizers versus Challengers: Towards a Theory of New Party Success," *International Political Science Review* 6, no. 4 (October 1985): 419-39.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Allan Sikk, "Newness as a Winning Formula for New Political Parties," *Party Politics* 18, no. 4 (2011): 465-86.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 467.

as environmentalism.<sup>13</sup> However, as we will see if we just focus on such parties the scope for analysis in the Taiwan case would be quite restricted. Moreover, environmental issues had already been widely debated by mainstream parties long before the first Green Party emerged in Taiwan. Robert Harmel and John Robertson propose including all registered parties in the analysis.<sup>14</sup> According to Taiwan's Ministry of Interior there were 244 registered parties in June 2013.<sup>15</sup> The majority of these have never contested elections, or won seats or significant vote shares. Thus most of these parties cannot be considered relevant parties worthy of serious academic attention. However, we need to consider what standards to apply for what constitutes a relevant party. Kenneth Janda suggests, for instance, any party gaining over 5 percent in a national election, while Rochan prefers any party that has gained at least one parliamentary seat.<sup>16</sup> I have chosen to take a broad approach to what constitutes a relevant party by including all parties gaining at least 1 percent of votes at the national level, running more than a handful of candidates (ideally in more than a single election), and having a policy platform. This approach allows us to analyze all serious attempts to challenge the mainstream parties but also to avoid getting bogged down with totally irrelevant party projects.

I have attempted to track the development of small parties in Taiwanese elections in tables 1-4. These include the overall vote shares and seats won by mainstream and small parties in parliamentary elections (table 1), candidates nominated and elected from the main small parties in national parliamentary elections (table 2), vote and seat shares for relevant small parties in national parliamentary elections (table 3), and vote

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<sup>13</sup>Ferdinand Müller-Rommel, "Ecology Parties in Western Europe," *West European Politics* 5, no. 1 (1982): 68-74.

<sup>14</sup>Robert Harmel and John D. Robertson, "Formation and Success of New Parties: A Cross National Analysis," *International Political Science Review* 6, no. 4 (October 1985): 501-23.

<sup>15</sup>For the list of parties, see the website of the Department of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Interior, [http://www.moi.gov.tw/dca/02people\\_005-1.aspx?sn=10](http://www.moi.gov.tw/dca/02people_005-1.aspx?sn=10) (accessed June 26, 2013).

<sup>16</sup>Kenneth Janda, *Political Parties: A Cross National Survey* (New York: Free Press, 1980); Rochan, "Mobilizers versus Challengers," 421.

**Table 1**  
**Vote Share and Seat Numbers of Established Parties versus Small Parties in National Parliamentary Elections**

	1989	1991	1992	1995	1996	1998	2001	2004	2005	2008	2012
Established parties	88.5% (93 seats)	95.1% (320 seats)	84.1% (146 seats)	79.2% (139 seats)	79.5% (282 seats)	76% (193 seats)	62% (155 seats)	68.6% (168 seats)	81.4 (244 seats)	88.1 (108 seats)	79.2 (104 seats)
Small parties	0.9% (0 seats)	2.2% (0 seats)	2% (1 seat)	13% (21 seats)	14.8% (50 seats)	10.3% (12 seats)	29.7% (60 seats)	21.8% (47 seats)	16% (48 seats)	11.1% (1 seat)	20.8% (6 seats)
Others	10.6% (8 seats)	2.7% (5 seats)	14% (14 seats)	7.8% (4 seats)	5.7% (5 seats)	13.7% (19 seats)	8.3% (10 seats)	9.6% (10 seats)	2.5% (8 seats)	0.7% (5 seats)	
Total seats available for election	101	325	161	164	334	225	225	225	300	113	113

**Notes:**

1. This table shows the vote share received by established and small parties in national parliamentary elections. The numbers of seats gained are shown in the parentheses.
2. Small parties refer to any challenger party that has received a minimum of 1% of the vote in a national parliamentary election. However, I have allowed a small amount of leeway by including the LP in this analysis, as with 0.92% in 1989 it is close enough to the threshold to warrant attention.
3. 1989 is for the supplementary Legislative Yuan election, 1991 and 1996 and 2005 are the National Assembly elections, and 1992, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2008 and 2012 are the Legislative Yuan elections.
4. Small parties in 1989 include LP (0.92); in 1991 the CSDP (2.12) and the LP (0.09); in 1992 the LP (0.4) and CSDP (1.55); in 1995 the NP (12.95); in 1996 the NP (13.67) and GP (1.09); in 1998 the NP (7.1), GP (0.1), NNA (1.6) and TIP (1.5); in 2001 the NP (2.6), PFP (18.6), TSU (8.5) TIP (0) and GP (0); and in 2004 the NP (0.12), TSU (7.79) and PFP (13.9); in 2005 the TSU, PFP, NP, TIP, CPP, Farmer's Party (FP) and Citizen's Party (CP).
5. Others refer to independents and minor parties not listed in note 4.
6. In 2008 and 2012 vote shares are from the proportional party list. The small party share covers all parties except for the DPP, KMT and Non Partisan Alliance. In 2008 the Others vote share refers only to the Non Partisan Alliance party list vote, while in 2012 the Non Partisan Alliance did not nominate a party list set of candidates, thus the Others vote share is left blank. Its three candidates were elected at the district level.
7. Small parties winning seats in 1992 were the CSDP (1); in 1995 the NP (21); in 1996 the NP (49) and GP (1); in 1998 the NP (11), NNA (1) and TIP (1); in 2001 the NP (1), PFP (46), and TSU (13); and in 2004 the NP (1), TSU (12) and PFP (34); in 2005 small parties winning seats were the TSU (21), PFP (18), NP (3), TIP (1), CPP (3), FP (1), and Citizen's Party (1); small parties winning seats in 2008: PFP (1); small parties winning seats in 2012: PFP (3), TSU (3).

**Sources:** National Chengchi University, Election Study Center website, <http://vote.nccu.edu.tw/engceec/vote4.asp>; Dafydd Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan* (London: Routledge, 2005); Christian Schaffer, *The Power of the Ballot Box* (London: Lexington, 2003).

**Table 2**  
**Candidates Nominated and Elected by Small Parties in National Parliamentary Elections**

	1989	1991	1992	1995	1996	1998	2001	2004	2005	2008	2012
NP				45 (21)	83 (49)	51 (11)	42 (1)	1 (1)	(3)	10 (0)	7 (0)
PFP							89 (46)	65 (34)	(18)	3 (1)	28 (3)
TIP						20 (1)	3 (0)	4 (0)	(1)		
TSU							55 (13)	40 (12)	(21)	28 (0)	10 (3)
LP	8 (0)	3 (0)	1 (0)								
CSDP		58 (0)	25 (1)								
GP					16 (1)	1 (0)	1 (0)			14 (0)	12 (0)
CPP									(3)		
NNA						12 (1)					

**Notes:**

1. This table shows the number of candidates nominated and elected by small parties in national parliamentary elections.
2. Candidates elected are shown in the parentheses.
3. WP (勞動黨) 1989: 3 (0), 1991: 1 (0), 1992: 2 (0), 1995: 2 (0), 1996: 2 (0). In 2005 I did not include the single seat won by the Farmer's Party, or the Civil Party's single seat.

**Sources:** National Chengchi University, Election Study Center website <http://vote.nccu.edu.tw/engceec/vote4.asp>; Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan*; Schaferer, *The Power of the Ballot Box*.

and seat shares for small parties in Taipei and Kaohsiung city council elections (table 4). The data for Taipei city council is worthy of attention as smaller parties have gained larger seat shares there than in national parliaments. The tables reveal first that based on my standards laid out above eight parties are regarded as relevant small parties. These are the

**Table 3**  
**The Vote and Seat Shares for Small Parties in National Parliamentary Elections**

	1989	1991	1992	1995	1996	1998	2001	2004	2005	2008	2012
NP				13 (12.8)	13.7 (14.7)	7.1 (4.9)	2.9 (0.4)	0.1 (0.4)	0.8 (1)	4 (0)	1.5 (0)
PFP							20.3 (20.4)	13.9 (15.1)	6.1 (6)	0 (0.9)	5.5 (2.7)
TIP						1.5 (0.4)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.3 (0.3)		
TSU							8.5 (5.8)	7.8 (5.3)	7 (7)	3.5 (0)	9 (2.7)
LP	0.92 (0)	0.1 (0)	0.4 (0)								
CSDP		2.1 (0)	1.6 (0.6)								
GP					1.1 (0.3)	0.1 (0)	0.0 (0)			0.6 (0)	1.7 (0)
CPP									1 (1)		
NNA						1.6 (0.4)					

**Notes:**

1. This table shows the vote share and seat shares for small parties in national parliamentary elections.
2. Seat shares are shown in the parentheses.

**Sources:** National Chengchi University, Election Study Center website <http://vote.nccu.edu.tw/engceec/vote4.asp>; Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan*; Schaferrer, *The Power of the Ballot Box*.

Chinese Social Democratic Party (CSDP), New Party (NP), Green Party Taiwan (GP), Taiwan Independence Party (建國黨, TIP), New Nation Alliance (新國家連線, NNA), People First Party (PFP), Taiwan Solidarity Union (台灣團結聯盟, TSU), and the Chinese People's Party (中國民眾黨, CPP). The one other party I have included in the tables is the Labor Party

**Table 4**  
**Vote and Seat Shares for Small Parties in Taipei (TPE) and Kaohsiung (KH)**  
**City Council Elections**

	1989		1994		1998		2002		2006		2010	
	KH	TPE	KH	TPE	KH	TPE	KH	TPE	KH	TP	KH	TP
NP			4.8 (4.6)	21.7 (21.2)	3.8 (2.3)	18.6 (17.3)	0.6 (0)	9.0 (9.8)	0.03 (0)	5.9 (7.7)	0.09 (0)	5.2 (3.8)
PFP							11.9 (15.9)	17.6 (15.7)	6.8 (9.1)	7 (3.8)	2 (1.5)	4.6 (3.2)
TSU							6.7 (4.6)	3.7 (0)	5.7 (2.2)	5.2 (3.8)	1.7 (0)	2.6 (1.6)
GP						1.5 (0)		0.1 (0)		0.4 (0)		1.2 (0)
TIP					1.9 (0)	0.7 (0)						
LP	(2.3)	(0)										
NNA						1.9 (0)						

**Note:**

1. This table shows the vote and seat shares received by small parties in Kaohsiung and Taipei City Council elections.
2. The seat shares are shown in the parentheses.
3. Data are missing for the Labor Party's (LP) vote share in 1989.
4. Kaohsiung city figures in 2010 are for the newly enlarged Kaohsiung City, and thus include districts previously in Kaohsiung County.

**Sources:** National Chengchi University, Election Study Center website <http://vote.nccu.edu.tw/engceec/vote4.asp>; Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan*; Schaferrer, *The Power of the Ballot Box*; Martin Lasater, *A Step toward Democracy: The December 1989 Elections in Taiwan, Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1990).

(工黨, LP). In 1989 it won 0.9 percent of the vote, contested three elections, had a Legislator and Kaohsiung city councilor, and was a serious candidate in a number of districts.<sup>17</sup> Some readers may be asking why I

<sup>17</sup>It should be noted though that its sole legislator Wang I-hsiung (王義雄) had been elected for the DPP in 1986 and defected when he formed the LP. He then failed in his bid for re-election under the LP label in 1989.

did not include the Non Partisan Alliance (無黨團結聯盟), which at least statistically has been quite successful.<sup>18</sup> However, this grouping lacks any real party platform and is essentially a personal vehicle for pro KMT politicians that the KMT prefers not to nominate.<sup>19</sup> However, since my study concentrates on the post 2004 period the explanatory analysis will focus on the NP, TSU, PFP and GP.

### **Phases of Small Party Electoral Development**

Tables 1-4 reveal that we can divide the electoral fortunes of the small parties into four or potentially five broad phases. Following the legalization of new parties in 1989 a large number of parties were registered and began contesting elections. However, the main challenger parties in the initial period were leftist parties such as the LP, CSDP, and Worker's Party (勞工黨, WP). Although many of the newly formed parties established after the lifting of martial law were formed around ideas of Chinese nationalism, and could be viewed as KMT purifiers, it was the leftist prophetic parties that had the greater impact. These parties did nominate significant numbers of candidates and received significant press attention in elections between 1989 and 1992. Nevertheless they were unable to make the critical breakthrough, with only two successful candidates. After 1992 these leftist parties largely disappeared as electoral forces.<sup>20</sup>

The next phase lasts for the remainder of the 1990s through until the 2000 presidential campaign. This time the major small parties were parties that had split off from the two mainstream parties partly as a result of dissatisfaction with their moderation on core ideological issues. Thus this is a period of purifier parties dominating the scene. The only exception to

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<sup>18</sup>In 1998 a similar grouping adopted the name Democratic Alliance (民主聯盟).

<sup>19</sup>Although the KMT is often prepared to cooperate with these politicians in elections and in parliament, it is reluctant to officially nominate them.

<sup>20</sup>One exception is the election of the first WP candidate Kao Wei-kai (高偉凱) in Hsinchu County Council in 2009.

this pattern was the emergence of the GP, which managed to win a seat in the 1996 National Assembly election and a 1 percent vote share in its first year after formation. A key feature of this period is how the small parties, particularly the NP, had a much greater impact than in the first period. The NP won vote and seat shares of around 13 percent in the mid-1990s and in fact was seen as performing unexpectedly well in the 1995 Legislative election.<sup>21</sup> In its stronghold of Taipei city council the NP managed to gain approximately 20 percent of seats and votes. If we think in comparative terms, the NP was winning a slightly lower national vote share than Britain's third party, the Liberal Democrats, and a much higher seat share. It also accrued significant media attention and had a major impact on the political agenda. The passion at its rallies was second to none except for perhaps the DPP's. In the mid 1990s two Taiwanese nationalist parties split off from the DPP, these being the Taiwan Independence Party (TIP) and the New Nation Alliance (NNA). However, both only won a single parliamentary seat and their main impact was to divide the pro DPP vote in 1998.

The 2000 presidential election marks the start of the third period. The election was won by the DPP's Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), while the runner up was a rebel KMT candidate James Soong. In the aftermath of Soong's narrowly unsuccessful campaign, he formed the PFP. He recruited politicians from both the KMT and NP that had supported his presidential campaign. The new era became apparent in the ultimately aborted National Assembly of May 2000 when the PFP nominated more extensively than any previous small party.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, another small party emerged on the Taiwanese nationalist side of Taiwan's politics called the TSU. This recruited mainly from politicians close to the former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) in the KMT and also some DPP politicians. The new era was confirmed in the 2001 legislative elections where the 1990s era splinter parties disappeared failing to win seats, while in contrast the

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<sup>21</sup>Dafydd Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan* (London: Routledge, 2005), 14.

<sup>22</sup>"National Assembly Election: 263 Register Yesterday," *Lianhe bao* (United News) (Taipei), April 14, 2000, 4.

PFPP and TSU gained almost a third of the seats. The PFP and the TSU also made breakthroughs in the Kaohsiung and Taipei city councils a year later. In Taipei the NP remained important, winning almost 10 percent of seats and votes in 2002. In fact, it even looked possible that the PFP could replace the KMT as the biggest challenger to the DPP, as its party identification figures exceeded the KMT's in 2001 and 2002.<sup>23</sup> Although the TSU and PFP suffered some loss of support in the 2004 parliamentary elections, they remained relevant parties, especially considering that there was a hung parliament from 2001-2008. With no party holding an overall majority, the small parties played an important role in supporting their allied mainstream parties. In terms of parties winning seats, the 2005 National Assembly election ranks as having the most diverse outcome, with five small parties winning seats. Thus this period from 2000-2005 represents the highpoint in Taiwan's multi-party scene.

The fourth phase's start point is debatable. Support for the third parties had been in decline since 2003 but it became especially apparent in late 2006 as PFP and TSU politicians began defecting in large numbers back to the mainstream parties. Then in 2008 the small parties were almost completely wiped out in the legislative elections.<sup>24</sup> The declining support for small parties had been visible in the 2006 city council elections and this pattern continued into 2010. That election left just one PFP city councillor in Kaohsiung and six small party city councillors in Taipei (3 NP, 2 PFP and 1 TSU).

It is unclear whether we are now witnessing a new phase of revived small parties in the light of the 2012 national elections. In that year the PFP and TSU both managed to win three seats, with the TSU's nine percent vote share in the proportional representation (PR) party list vote being

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<sup>23</sup>The party identification figures for the PFP in 2001 were 18.9 percent and in 2002 were 15.9 percent. By contrast, the figures for the KMT were 14.8 percent in 2001 and 14.4 percent in 2002. See Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, "Trends in Core Political Attitudes among Taiwanese," <http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/english/modules/ti-nyd2/content/partyID.htm>.

<sup>24</sup>The only successful small party candidate was Lin Cheng-er (林正二) who stood in the Plains Aboriginal district.

especially noteworthy.<sup>25</sup> Although the GP was unable to win any seats, it continued its gradual improvement with 1.7 percent of the vote share, coming fifth ahead of the NP for the first time. This represents its highest vote share and only the second highest vote share for a prophetic party.<sup>26</sup> In short, 2012 suggests a potential revival of small parties, but the test of whether this was a one off or a trend setting election will come in the 2014 city and county council elections. 2014 will be especially significant as it will be the first time all city and county council elections have been held in the same year.<sup>27</sup>

### Explaining Small Party Success

Comparative politics has developed a number of perspectives on how to best explain the impact of smaller parties. One approach is to examine sociological variables to determine the impact of smaller parties. Here the link is made between the salience of challenger parties' favored issues and their electoral impact. For instance, studies have tried to link the salience of immigration issues together with levels of unemployment with the rise of far right parties in Europe.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Robert Inglehart and Ferdinand Müller-Rommel have argued there is a positive correlation between higher levels of post-materialism in society and green party success.<sup>29</sup> These approaches do have some value in the Taiwanese case,

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<sup>25</sup>Less than a year after the 2012 election, the PFP was reduced to 2 legislators after Lin Cheng-er again had his legislator status cancelled as a result of a political corruption case. This took the PFP below the minimum number of legislators (3) for a legislative caucus.

<sup>26</sup>The highest remains the 2.1 percent for the SDP in 1991.

<sup>27</sup>Previously Taipei and Kaohsiung City Council elections had been held a year after those held in the other cities and counties.

<sup>28</sup>Duane Swank and Hans-Georg Betz, "Globalization, the Welfare State and Right Wing Populism in Western Europe," *Socio-Economic Review* 1, no. 2 (2003): 215-45.

<sup>29</sup>Robert Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Ferdinand Müller-Rommel, "The New Challengers: Explaining the Success of Green and Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe," in *Les Petits Partis*, ed. Annie Laurent and Bruno Villalba (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), 119-41.

as the high salience of national identity issues does partly explain the relative success of identity oriented purifier parties such as the NP and TSU. Similarly, ethnicity has played a role as Mainlanders have held a dominant position in the two most successful small parties (NP and PFP) and Mainlanders made up a high proportion of their grassroots support. However, this cannot tell us the whole story as it fails to explain why the KMT's splinter parties have been far more successful than those on the pro DPP side. If sociological explanations were decisive we would expect the opposite outcome, especially considering the progressive decline in Chinese identity and support for unification among Taiwanese voters.<sup>30</sup> This approach also cannot explain why environmental parties struggled to get off the ground in Taiwan despite the moderately high salience of environmental issues.

One of the most popular explanations that have been applied to examinations of party systems has been institutional. These studies represent an extension of the work on the consequences of electoral systems first developed by Maurice Duverger.<sup>31</sup> Thus smaller parties are less likely to emerge as relevant parties in single member district (SMD) or first past the post (FPTP) electoral systems that tend to feature two party competition. By contrast, third parties should enjoy greater space in proportional representation (PR) systems. This impact can be seen in the case of the Green Party in the United Kingdom. The Green Party only gained its first seat after decades of struggle in the FPTP House of Commons elections in 2010 but it has managed to win seats in the proportional European Parliament electoral contests. This approach is important for the Taiwan case as the above tables reveal how small parties have won seats in the parliamentary and local council seats which use(d) a semi-proportional single non transferable vote with multi-member districts (MMD) electoral

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<sup>30</sup>For the key identity trends, see National Chengchi University's Election Study Center, "Trends in Core Political Attitudes among Taiwanese," <http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/english/modules/tiny2/index.php?id=6>.

<sup>31</sup>Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties, Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (London: Methuen, 1954).

system. By contrast, small parties have made far fewer inroads into the SMD contests for executive posts and or the presidency. The fact that Taiwan moved to a new predominantly SMD electoral system after 2005 allows us to test this approach in the subsequent parliamentary elections of 2008 and 2012.

Bonnie Meguid has been critical of both sociological and institutional explanations of small party success.<sup>32</sup> She suggests that instead mainstream party strategies are critical to explaining the impact of niche parties. She argues that mainstream parties can adopt dismissive, accommodative or adversarial strategies on the niche parties' core issue. Under this theory the first two approaches tend to undermine the impact of smaller parties, as while dismissive strategies decrease the issue salience, accommodative strategies will enable the mainstream party to steal the ownership of the niche party's issue. The ideal scenario for small parties is where mainstream parties take adversarial approaches towards the smaller parties' core issues. This, according to Meguid, will favor the niche party as it will not only raise the salience of the core issue but also reinforce its ownership over the issue.

A hybrid approach to explaining small party success was developed by Paul Lucardie to examine the case of the GP in the Netherlands. He proposed a comprehensive framework in which small party success or failure can be explained by three factors: (1) a political project that addresses problems considered important by much of the electorate, (2) sufficient resources, and (3) the political opportunity structure.<sup>33</sup> In other words, small party success depends on their ability to propagate a clear and distinct party appeal that addresses salient political issues; their human, financial, organizational, and media resources; and the ability to take advantage of their electoral environment.

This framework has been employed to explain the impact of third parties in Taiwan in the period from the late 1980s through to 2004 by

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<sup>32</sup>Meguid, *Party Competition between Unequals*, 6-13.

<sup>33</sup>Lucardie, "Prophets, Purifiers and Prolocutors," 175-85.

Fell.<sup>34</sup> He showed how the NP was able to expand its vote share by combining its anti-Taiwan independence and pro Mainlander ethnic rhetoric with popular appeals such as exposing KMT corruption, a five day working week and calls for cross-Strait peace and closer economic ties with China. At the same time it benefitted from rich human resources, as so many of its founding politicians had extensive government and election experience in the KMT. Such politicians were able to also raise the financial resources so critical to Taiwanese campaigns. In addition, the NP was able to benefit from the favorable political environment. For instance, it focused on the semi-proportional MMD electoral system used for parliamentary and local council elections. However, it also emerged at the time when the KMT was in decline organizationally, was suffering from a worsening party image and was moving away from core issue positions. Thus the NP was able to poach both voters and politicians from its original party.

A final way of understanding the impact of small parties in the literature is to focus on small party agency. Spoon argues that small parties can survive even in inhospitable institutional contexts if they can get the right balance between the sometimes conflicting goals of maintaining their core party ideals and the needs of vote or seat maximization.<sup>35</sup> Using the cases of French and British Green Parties, she shows how the French GP was comparatively more successful at balancing these goals and thus had a greater political impact.

### **Explaining the Third Parties' Strong Showing in 2005**

Since this paper focuses on the fortunes of small parties after 2004, the first trend we need to explain is their strong performance in the 2005 National Assembly election. The election was noteworthy in that five

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<sup>34</sup>Fell, "The Rise and Decline of the New Party," 47-67.

<sup>35</sup>Spoon, *Political Survival*.

small parties won National Assembly seats. In addition to the TSU and PFP, smaller parties from the 1990s such as the NP and TIP, as well as for the first time the Chinese People's Party (中國民眾黨, CPP) had won seats.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, this election should not be taken as an especially significant landmark in the development of small parties. There was a record low turnout of only 23.4 percent, reflecting low voter interest in the election.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, this was the final National Assembly election, as after voting on a constitutional reform package the body was effectively abolished. The institutional approach offers the key to understanding the diversity in the outcome, as this election used a pure proportional system, with a single nationwide district. Moreover by comparing the PFP's vote share in December 2004's legislative election (13.9) with May 2005's National Assembly contest (6.1), the halving of the party's vote share reveals it was in serious decline. Its party identification levels were also collapsing by 2005, as it fell from almost 10 percent in 2004 to 4 percent in 2005.<sup>38</sup> It is even quite possible that most of the 1 percent who voted for the CPP did so as a result of confusing it with the KMT, as they have very similar Chinese names. In short, the 2005 National Assembly elections represent a false dawn for small parties.

### **Explaining the Clear Decline 2006-2010**

Our next task then is to explain the lengthy period of obvious small party decline between 2006 and 2010. The common explanation is to look at the mechanical effects of the new SMD electoral system that was

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<sup>36</sup>Additionally the Farmer's Party and Citizen's Party each won a single seat.

<sup>37</sup>Central Election Commission database, 2005 National Assembly results, <http://db.cec.gov.tw/histMain.jsp?voteSel=20050501A9>.

<sup>38</sup>See Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, "Trends in Core Political Attitudes among Taiwanese," <http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/english/modules/tinyd2/content/partyID.htm>.

first used in 2008.<sup>39</sup> Undoubtedly, the new system did have a negative effect, squeezing the space for smaller parties. The new system meant that in most districts there could only be one competitive candidate on the Blue and Green sides, as a second candidate on either side would split the vote and potentially allow the rival party to win. This encouraged voters to concentrate their votes on their preferred mainstream party candidates and served to push incumbent small party politicians to defect to the mainstream parties. Nevertheless, as Spoon has shown, smaller parties can survive hostile institutional settings. In 2005 the PFP still had a large number of politicians with district electoral strength, while the TSU had polled 8 percent in multiple elections (2001 and 2004), and thus both had the potential to remain a relevant party even under the new electoral system. Moreover, if the electoral system alone was the decisive factor, why then did the small parties re-emerge in 2012 under the same unfavorable system?

Instead I argue that the decline in the small parties through to 2010 is best explained with reference to the interrelationship between the small parties and their mainstream partner parties. In other words, understanding this fall incorporates elements of Meguid's mainstream party strategies and Spoon's small party agency approach.

After the PFP was created in 2000 it was quite successful at creating a distinct party image based around the reputation of its leader James Soong. Soong had been able to attract a large number of politicians with genuine electoral experience and strength.<sup>40</sup> The party also chose to take a relatively moderate line on policy matters compared to its predecessor KMT splinter party, the NP. In fact, beyond its image as being the party of a competent governing team, the PFP often chose to appear highly ambiguous on policy matters. In its first three years, the PFP also worked

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<sup>39</sup>For instance see, Hans Stockton, "How Rules Matter: Electoral Reform in Taiwan," *Social Science Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (March 2010): 21-41; Chung-li Wu, "A Simple Model for Predicting the Outcome of the 2008 Legislative Yuan Elections in Taiwan," *Issues & Studies* 44, no. 4 (December 2008): 1-28.

<sup>40</sup>For instance, numerous PFP's legislative candidates in 2001 were incumbent legislators originally elected under KMT or NP banners.

on developing its brand image as the orange party, with the colour and fruit consistently used in its advertising.<sup>41</sup> By contrast, the KMT was still recovering from its disastrous defeat in 2000 and struggled to compete with its new rival. The success the PFP initially had is reflected in its fine election performance in 2001 and 2002 and in how it exceeded the KMT's party identification level in those two years.<sup>42</sup> If the PFP had retained its independent strategy in 2004, it probably would have led to a repeat of the 2000 election, but it could well have allowed the PFP to replace the KMT as the second largest party and dominant party on the Blue wing of Taiwanese politics.<sup>43</sup>

However, the roots of the PFP's decline lay in its peak period and the increasingly intimate working relations it developed with the KMT. As early as late 2000 the two parties began working closely together in parliament to block the DPP government's policy agenda. For example, it cooperated closely with the KMT over the bid to force the DPP government to resume construction on the Fourth Nuclear Power station in 2001.<sup>44</sup> They began limited cooperation on election nomination in some seats in 2001 and expanded this in 2002.<sup>45</sup> Increasingly, analysts talked of the KMT, PFP and NP as a Pan Blue block rather than separate parties. This process culminated in the decision to run a joint ticket for the 2004 presidential election with the KMT chair as the presidential candidate and

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<sup>41</sup>See PFP ad, *Lianhe bao* (United Daily) (Taipei), November 21, 2001, 12.

<sup>42</sup>See Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, "Trends in Core Political Attitudes among Taiwanese," <http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/english/modules/tinyd2/content/partyID.htm>.

<sup>43</sup>Since 2000 it has been common to distinguish between Blue and Green in Taiwanese politics. These are the two main colours in the KMT and DPP party flags respectively. Thus parties seen as being in the Blue camp are the KMT, PFP, and NP, while the DPP, TSU, TIP and NNA can be categorized as Green parties.

<sup>44</sup>For discussion of the Fourth Nuclear Power Station dispute see Linda Arrigo and Gaia Puleston, "The Environmental Movement after 2000," in *What Has Changed? Taiwan Before and After the Change in Ruling Parties*, ed. Dafydd Fell, Henning Klöter, and Chang Bi-yu (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 176-80.

<sup>45</sup>For instance, the KMT, PFP and NP jointly campaigned for Wang Chien-hsuan in the Taipei County mayoral election in 2001 and these three parties supported the KMT candidate Ma Ying-jeou's re-election as Taipei mayor in 2002.

the PFP's Soong as his running mate. The PFP was largely invisible in this campaign and this marginalization made it appear the PFP had been taken over by the KMT. A sign of this pattern was the growing talk of a KMT-PFP merger after the 2004 presidential defeat through into 2005.<sup>46</sup>

The blurring of the distinctions between the KMT and PFP accelerated into the second DPP term (2004-2008). The two parties worked together closely to repeatedly block the DPP executive's legislative agenda. For example, they prevented discussion of the DPP's US arms procurement bill from reaching the legislative floor numerous times, delayed approval of the 2007 central budget until after the start of the fiscal year, and by refusing to approve the president's Control Yuan nominees, left the body dormant for three years.<sup>47</sup> At times the two parties cooperated to impose legislation on the DPP executive, such as the regulations for nomination of members on the National Communications Commission and the Central Election Commission, and by establishing a Truth Committee to investigate the March 19, 2004 assassination incident.<sup>48</sup> When KMT Chairman Lien Chan (連戰) made his groundbreaking visit to China in April 2005, PFP Chair Soong followed suit one month later.

Following the Pan Blues narrow presidential defeat in 2004, there were a series of demonstrations protesting against the legitimacy of the result. PFP politicians were especially visible in these protests, many of which turned violent. For example, PFP legislator Chiu Yi (邱毅) attempted to smash through the gates of the Kaohsiung District Court with a campaign truck and Soong famously called on supporters to storm the presidential palace. Both these incidents were subsequently used in DPP election ads to accuse the Pan Blues of creating political instability. Such

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<sup>46</sup>For a discussion of this issue see Da-Chi Liao, "'Guo' yu 'Qin' de fen yu he: lixing yu ganxing de bahe" (The unification or separation between the KMT and PFP: a tug of war between affection and rationality), *Taiwan minzhu jikan* (Taiwan Democracy Quarterly) (Taipei) 1, no. 3 (September 2004): 203-11.

<sup>47</sup>Ko Shu-ling, "Same Old Tune: KMT Blocks Arms Bill," *Taipei Times*, September 7, 2005, 1; "PFP, KMT Plan to Push Legislation Through," *Taipei Times*, February 27, 2007, 3.

<sup>48</sup>Chang Yun-ping, "'Truth Committee' Statue Goes Too Far, DPP Says," *Taipei Times*, August 25, 2004, 3.

incidents served to undermine the PFP's reputation as a moderate party, replacing it with a violent and radical image. By contrast, though the KMT had led the 2004 campaign, a number of its key figures such as Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and Wang Jin-pyng (王金平) took a more cautious line on the protests.

When the PFP did try to highlight its independent positions, these attempts tended to be short-lived and thus less convincing. For instance, in February 2005 Soong and Chen met and reached a ten point agreement on a range of issues.<sup>49</sup> However, trust quickly broke down as only weeks later he announced he would follow Lien in a PRC visit. There was also occasional talk of the PFP cooperating with the DPP over legislation dealing with KMT party assets.<sup>50</sup> However, these never materialised into effective legislative voting. Lastly, in 2006 Soong stood against the official KMT candidate for Taipei mayor. Once again this was not effective as he did not stand on a PFP ticket and this was just one isolated case and both before and after the election the PFP-KMT legislative cooperation continued unabated. In other words, the PFP had increasingly lost its distinctive party image.

In addition to working together on a range of policy areas, the two parties enhanced their nomination cooperation after 2004. However, the process moved from cooperation to a more predatory approach by the KMT in which it increasingly took over the PFP's most prized assets, its legislators. The model was set in 2005 when a number of PFP politicians returned to the KMT to join its primaries for the local executive elections. In fact, in Taipei County a PFP legislator Chou Hsi-wei (周錫瑋) won the KMT's primary and the subsequent county magistrate election. This poaching of PFP politicians strangely did not damage the PFP-KMT relationship and once the precedent had been set there was a wave of defections in 2006-7 to join the KMT's legislative primaries for the 2008

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<sup>49</sup>Caroline Hong and Huang Tai-lin, "Chen, Soong Sign 10-Point Consensus," *Taipei Times*, February 25, 2005, 1.

<sup>50</sup>"DPP Pessimistic on PFP Cooperation on Assets Law," *Taipei Times*, December 21, 2004, 3.

elections.<sup>51</sup> In the spring of 2007 the PFP still had twenty legislators, many of whom had the electoral strength to win in SMDs. The KMT and PFP resolved the problem through negotiations, in which the KMT cleared the way by giving PFP legislators a free run in a number of SMDs and three party list seats.<sup>52</sup> However, the conditions were that these PFP politicians would stand as KMT candidates and the PFP would not nominate a PR list. Therefore, following the election the PFP was left with only a single legislator. Even though the KMT did not ask the former PFP legislators to renounce their membership, once the PFP tried to regain its independence, none of its former politicians returned to the fold.

Therefore, the interrelationship between the KMT and PFP was critical in the PFP's decline. If the PFP had adopted a more independent and distinctive policy line and refused to accept the KMT's conditions for a nomination agreement, it is quite likely it could have remained a smaller but still relevant party. In fact the PFP should have known what would be the result of this kind of collaboration from the case of the NP in 2004. The KMT and NP negotiated a similar agreement in which the NP did not nominate a PR list and a number of NP politicians were nominated under a KMT banner. There was only one winner here as the agreement essentially allowed the KMT to poach some of the NP's best known politicians such as Lai Shyh-Bao (賴士葆) and Fai Alex Hrong-Tai (費鴻泰). In both cases, these former NP and PFP politicians once elected had effectively been annexed by the KMT.

Thus, if we consider Meguid's framework, the mainstream party (KMT) was adopting an accommodative stance towards the small party both in terms of issues but also nomination. However, as Spoon has shown, small parties agency can also be critical to their fortunes and therefore the PFP's demise was not inevitable. If the PFP had nominated

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<sup>51</sup>For instance in January 2006 one of the most popular PFP legislators Diane Lee (李慶安) defected to the KMT. See Mo Yan-chih, "Lee Leaves PFP to Rejoin KMT," *Taipei Times*, January 15, 2006, 3.

<sup>52</sup>In addition, in some districts informal survey based primaries were used to choose between the registered KMT candidate and an incumbent PFP. This method was used in Kaohsiung City District 1.

its own set of candidates in 2008, it might have remained a relevant party. By accepting the KMT's terms' for nomination agreements, the PFP and NP allowed their legislators to be annexed by the KMT. The PFP's strategic mistakes meant that it sacrificed its party identity as well as electoral prospects.

The impact of the DPP-TSU relationship on the TSU's decline showed similarities and differences from the case of the pan Blue splinters. After being formed, the TSU tried to stake out a more extreme position than the DPP on the national identity spectrum. Thus it was more like the NP in being a purifier, rather than the purifier light stances employed by the PFP. The TSU also worked closely with the DPP both in parliament and in the SMD local executive and 2004 presidential campaigns. The TSU was at least until 2006 more successful at maintaining its own party identity and this may explain why it actually maintained its vote and seat shares in the 2004 and 2005 elections, in contrast to the decline seen on the part of the PFP. However, in 2008 it suffered the same fate as the PFP, being wiped out in the Legislative Yuan. However, the process and relationship with its partner mainstream party was slightly different.

The decline of the TSU became more apparent later than that of the PFP, particularly in the final two years of the second DPP term. A first variable was ideology, which was more significant due to the greater emphasis on ideology on the part of the TSU. The initially relatively moderate cross-Strait and national identity approach of the DPP under Chen left space for the TSU to develop its appeal to those on the pro-independence side of the identity spectrum. However, Chen's announcement of the abolition of the National Unification Council and Guidelines in 2006 represented the start of a series of DPP appeals into formerly TSU issue territory.<sup>53</sup> Public opinion increasingly viewed the DPP as becoming more radical in these last two years and thus squeezed the space for the TSU.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Hsiao-Chi Hsu, "Domestic Vulnerability and Nationalist Propaganda: Taiwan's National Unification Council Campaign in 2006," *Issues & Studies* 46, no. 4 (December 2010): 37-72.

<sup>54</sup>This was confirmed in opinion polls showing that the DPP was viewed as more radical than

In Meguid's terms, the DPP had adopted an accommodative strategy which seriously undermined the TSU's ownership of the Taiwan independence issue. Of course the TSU was aware of this challenge and thus did attempt in 2008 to combine its anti-China approach with new appeals that showed its distinctiveness. For instance, Lee once again became prominent in its TV ads and it attempted to appeal to new niche constituencies such as students and the disabled. But it is questionable whether voters were convinced by the new image since it came so late in the campaign.

Like the KMT, the DPP welcomed stronger allied party legislators to stand under a DPP banner in 2008's legislative election, particularly in districts where it lacked well known politicians. However, the DPP-TSU negotiations over nomination were far less harmonious than those between the KMT and PFP. For instance, the DPP did not offer the TSU seats on its PR list or in winnable district seats. In one of the two districts the DPP left open for the TSU, its candidate only gained 11 percent in Taipei County District 9. Thus in return for supporting the DPP's presidential candidate the TSU received nothing substantial. These failed negotiations meant that the TSU felt forced to compete with the DPP in both the district and PR list legislative contests. This competition served to undermine both parties in the actual campaign. At this point though the TSU had much less scope for agency in controlling its own fate compared to the PFP, as its legislators had tended to rely on party image more than the PFP politicians.

The TSU's bid for independence from the DPP at the last minute shows parallels with the NP in 2008. Although the NP did not nominate at the district level, it did try to compete with the KMT at the PR level in 2008. Its campaign stressed the NP's unwavering commitment to the Republic of China and opposition to Taiwan independence.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, this attempt to regain its foothold in parliament also failed as the party fell

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the TSU on the unification versus independence spectrum by 2008. See Taiwan Election and Democratization Study (2008) Legislative Elections, Final Report 2008.

<sup>55</sup>See NP ad, *China Times*, January 11, 2008, A16.

1 percent short of the required 5 percent threshold. The KMT's swing to the right after 2005 and its earlier poaching of the NP's electoral stars undermined the NP's campaign.<sup>56</sup>

Meguid's framework is thus more useful for explaining the demise of both the TSU and the NP. The mainstream parties' swings into the smaller parties' ideological space represent an accommodative approach that allowed the mainstream party to steal the small parties' core issues. Spoon's agency approach is less useful in this case as both the TSU and NP, however, lacked the kind of human resources of the PFP.

The decline in the small parties' electoral fortunes continued after 2008 as all three splinter parties struggled to recover from their elimination from the Legislative Yuan. This continued decline is visible from the drop in their vote and seat shares in the 2010 Kaohsiung and Taipei city council elections. In fact, the only small party that bucked the downward trend was the GP, which increased its vote share in Taipei from 0.4 to 1 percent. In contrast to the accommodative (regarding policy) and predatory mainstream nomination strategies towards small parties seen in the second DPP term, in the first two years of the Ma administration the main parties took a dismissive attitude towards the smaller parties.

### **Explaining the Revival of Small Parties in 2012**

There are two challenges for understanding 2012. The first is to explain why the PFP, TSU and GP all performed well despite the unfavorable electoral system. Secondly, why did the NP fail follow the fellow splinter parties in their revival? In all four cases I argue that Meguid and Spoon's approaches are most useful as their fate was closely connected to both mainstream party strategies and their own agency.

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<sup>56</sup>Voters had perceived the KMT as having a position on the right of the national identity spectrum since Lee Teng-hui left the party in 2000. Ma's comment in a *Newsweek* interview in late 2005 that the KMT's ultimate goal is unification reflects how the KMT was moving into the NP's territory.

Firstly, the NP was the one party not following the growth trend. During the first Ma term the NP's chairman Yu Mu-ming (郁慕明) remained active in China-Taiwan relations. The party however, was put into an awkward position as many of its core policy demands were being put into practice by the KMT in the field of closer economic integration with China.<sup>57</sup> This left the NP highly reliant on the unpopular position of supporting unification. In the run up to the 2012 elections the NP came out strongly in support of the KMT's presidential candidate but was not seen as being worthy of the KMT offering it any support on the PR list. In other words, the KMT squeezed the NP's space by taking an accommodative approach on policy and a dismissive one on nomination. The NP did attempt to stake out a new issue stance but there were not enough votes at such an extreme pro-unification position in the electoral market.

It is rather ironic that the TSU actually benefitted from its elimination from the Legislative Yuan in 2008. This enabled it to break free from its alliance with the DPP and develop its own policy image. In the aftermath of the DPP's defeat of 2008, the DPP attempted to appear more moderate on China, which gave the TSU space again to develop on that policy area. Although both opposed the ECFA trade agreement with China, it was the TSU that was most vocal and consistent in its opposition. This was particularly clear in its repeated attempts to promote a national referendum on ECFA.<sup>58</sup> These referendum drives were frustrated by the KMT dominated referendum review committee, but they gained the TSU significant media attention.<sup>59</sup> Once the ECFA had been passed the DPP opposition became more lukewarm, further expanding the TSU's space to dominate the issue area. For instance, the DPP attempted to steer the campaign agenda 2012 away from cross-Strait relations. Thus in Meguid's terms the TSU benefitted from the DPP's increasing lack of

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<sup>57</sup>The NP had proposed closer economic integration along the lines of the 2010 ECFA agreement since the mid 1990s.

<sup>58</sup>Rich Chang, "TSU Launches ECFA Referendum," *Taipei Times*, March 15, 2010, 3.

<sup>59</sup>Shih Hsiu-chuan, "Committee Votes against TSU Referendum Proposal," *Taipei Times*, December 28, 2011, 1.

interest (dismissive) and the KMT's adversarial approach in promoting economic and political integration with China.

Nevertheless, this TSU policy niche alone would probably not have been sufficient to get over the challenging five percent threshold to gain parliamentary seats in 2012. Its collaborative nomination agreement with the DPP this time was much more successful than that of 2008. This time the TSU (and Lee Teng-hui) openly supported the DPP's Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), and it did not nominate at the district level, concentrating instead on the party list level. Thus the TSU attempted to convince voters that the DPP was willing to sacrifice some PR votes in exchange for the TSU's support for Tsai. For instance, one newspaper ad in the final week of the campaign showed images of Lee Teng-hui, TSU chair Huang Kun-huei (黃崑輝) and Tsai Ing-wen.<sup>60</sup> It called on voters to vote for either the TSU or DPP on the PR party vote and DPP for the president and district legislator. What is interesting here is that the TSU had fewer bargaining chips as it was on paper far weaker than four years earlier, but it successfully negotiated a more balanced agreement. As the election was so close in 2012, the DPP needed Lee Teng-hui's endorsement of Tsai in the final week of the campaign. Apart from the fact that the TSU gained three seats with its 9 percent PR vote, we can see the effect from the fact that though the DPP's presidential vote rose from 41.5 to 45.6 percent, its parliamentary PR vote actually declined from 36.9 to 34.6 percent.

The PFP was technically in a slightly more healthy state than the TSU after the 2008 elections. It had one legislator and a number of its city councilors had not defected. However, its sole legislator Lin Cheng-er (林正二) was disqualified for vote buying in 2010 and the PFP's seat and vote share continued to be eroded in the 2010 local elections.

Unlike in 2008, neither the KMT nor the PFP were prepared to cooperate over nomination in 2012. The PFP had clearly learned from its 2008 experience of being virtually annexed by the KMT. Similarly the KMT believed it no longer needed to worry about the PFP in SMDs as it

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<sup>60</sup>*Liberty Times*, January 10, 2012, A7.

had lost most of its strongest politicians in 2008. A sign of the tensions between the two parties was the long running legal case taken out by KMT secretary general King Pu-tsong (金溥聰) against Soong over his accusation that King had faked opinion surveys to undermine Soong's campaign in 2000.<sup>61</sup> Some preliminary talks were held but these broke down without any agreements on nomination.<sup>62</sup>

In the run up to the 2012 election, the PFP tried to take a distinctive approach on both issue strategy and nomination. On issues it was critical of both mainstream parties. For instance, its ads criticized the blue green divide and the damaging consequences for Taiwan.<sup>63</sup> However, the PFP devoted greater attention to criticizing the performance of the KMT administration. A prime example of this was PFP legislative candidate Liu Wen-hsiung's (劉文雄) regular appearances on politics talk shows where he joined Pan Green speakers in attacking Ma. Liu's attacks often questioned the integrity of Ma's campaign funding, leading the KMT to take out a defamation case against Liu. The PFP strategy was targeted at light Blue supporters or non partisans who were dissatisfied with the Ma government performance. This approach seemed to be working as for much of the campaign Soong was competitive with the main candidates among non-partisan voters.<sup>64</sup>

In contrast to 2008, the PFP adopted a highly independent and adversarial nomination policy in 2012 towards the KMT. It not only nominated a PR list and district legislators, but its chairman James Soong also stood for the presidency.<sup>65</sup> Although Soong could not match his popularity in 1999-2000, his presidential campaign did serve to boost not only his own support levels but also the PFP. The strategy had the potential to be

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<sup>61</sup>Mo Yan-chih, "PFP-KMT Animosity Appears to Deepen," *Taipei Times*, July 6, 2011, 1.

<sup>62</sup>Mo Yan-chih, "PFP Wants Action Before Ma-Soong Meet," *Taipei Times*, June 29, 2011, 3.

<sup>63</sup>See PFP ad, *Liberty Times*, January 7, 2012, A1.

<sup>64</sup>It was only in the final six weeks that Soong's support levels collapsed. See TVBS Poll Center, "Survey Two Days before the 2012 Presidential Election," [http://www1.tvbs.com.tw/tvbs2011/pch/tvbs\\_poll\\_center.aspx](http://www1.tvbs.com.tw/tvbs2011/pch/tvbs_poll_center.aspx).

<sup>65</sup>It should be noted though that Soong stood as an independent rather than a PFP candidate.

highly threatening to the KMT as polls had shown Tsai close to Ma and at least initially Soong had a support rate of about 15 percent. Even in the district races, the PFP tended to nominate candidates in districts with KMT incumbents, thus again threatening to split the pro KMT vote and allow the DPP to benefit. In the run up to the election Soong's support rate began to decline and eventually he only received 2.7 percent. However, the overall strategy worked, but only just. The main objective of the presidential campaign was to raise the visibility of the PFP's PR (and to a lesser extent its district) candidates. The PFP's 5.5 percent in the PR list was higher than Soong's presidential vote, and enough to allow two PFP legislators on the PR list to be elected. In addition, Lin Cheng-er was again elected for the PFP in the Plains Aboriginal District, leaving the party with three legislators.

In the case of the PFP then, Spoon's agency approach has greater explanatory value. Despite the KMT's largely dismissive attitude towards its former ally, the PFP was able to develop its own niche appeal and adversarial nomination strategy that enabled it to just pass the 5 percent threshold required for PR seats.

Finally we have the case of the GP, which though not winning any seats won its best ever vote share (1.7 percent) and even beat the NP to come fifth in the PR vote. With a lack of human and financial resources the GP on its own has only limited agency to affect its election outcome. However, as with the TSU and PFP it benefitted from its changed relationship with the main parties.

Under the DPP administration the environmental movement had faced a dilemma as the DPP is generally viewed as a more pro-environment and anti-nuclear party. Moreover, the DPP both invited a number of environmental leaders to serve in its cabinets and it also gave environmentalists greater access to the policy making process.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, the DPP increasingly compromised with big business in order to deal with

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<sup>66</sup>For more on the DPP's relationship with the environmental movement see Arrigo and Puleston, "The Environmental Movement after 2000," 176-80.

a sluggish economy, causing the environmental movement to become increasingly disillusioned with the DPP. Thus the GP began to reemerge in the final years of the DPP era as an independent force. We can see this in the way that, after being largely dormant for the first five years of the DPP era, the GP once again nominated candidates both in the 2006 Taipei city council and 2008 legislative elections.

In the first Ma Ying-jeou term Taiwan's environmental movement showed a major revival and the GP has been one of the beneficiaries of this development.<sup>67</sup> The KMT took a clear policy of promoting economic growth and continued to develop its nuclear energy policy. This was evident in its initial strong support for the planned Kuokuang Petrochemical plant in Changhua and continued construction of the Fourth Nuclear Power Station. The DPP tended to oppose these projects but was rather marginal in these protests, partly as a result of its government record and desire not to gain an anti-business image. Although initially the KMT strongly supported the Kuokuang plant, the strong protest movement meant that even the KMT felt it needed to abandon it in the run up to the 2012 presidential elections.<sup>68</sup> The Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011 also helped raise the salience of the environmental issues and the visibility of the GP. Thus in the run up to the 2012 elections the GP faced the combination of a DPP taking a low key approach to environmental issues and the KMT taking an economic growth first adversarial approach. As Meguid suggests, this ought to raise the salience of the GP's issue and promote its issue ownership.

The GP also benefitted to a certain extent from an unofficial cooperation agreement with the DPP. In Taipei City District 7 the GP candidate Pan Han-shen (潘翰聲) reached an agreement with the DPP that in return for giving the GP a free run against the KMT and DPP local support, Pan

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<sup>67</sup>The sense of a resurgence in social movement activism is present in publications such as H. H. Michael Hsiao and Ku Chung-hua, eds., *Taiwan shehui yundong zai chufa* (The revival of Taiwan's social movements) (Taipei: Chuliu, 2010).

<sup>68</sup>Shelley Shan and Mo Yan-chih, "Taskforce Equivocates on Naphtha Plant," *Taipei Times*, April 23, 2011, 1.

would support the DPP's presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen. This agreement created considerable controversy within the GP, as it had not been a party to party agreement.<sup>69</sup> However, it gave the GP's Pan national media coverage in a way unprecedented for the party and expert campaign assistance. Pan's 24 percent was the highest vote share ever achieved by a GP candidate and made him the GP's first well known figure.

### **Conclusions and Future Prospects for Small Parties**

This paper has examined the fluctuating fortunes of Taiwan's small parties since 2004. It shows that institutional variables alone are insufficient to explain the impact of these actors. Instead I argue that the relationship between the dominant mainstream parties and smaller parties is critical in understanding the space for smaller parties. The paper finds support for Meguid's argument that the strategies adopted by mainstream parties towards small parties plays a major role in their impact. In addition, as Spoon suggests, the Taiwan case reveals how small parties can also shape their own fate by getting a balance between party ideals and the goal of electoral success. In other words, small parties can also persevere in an unfavorable political environment with independent issue strategies. Moreover, one of the key findings in this study has been the importance of nomination negotiations between mainstream and small parties. Favorable agreements can offer small parties the chance to remain relevant, while predatory nomination agreements can result in small parties' virtual elimination.

So what are the prospects for Taiwan's small parties? This will depend upon how they build on the progress made in the 2012 campaign and develop their party images. The debates over the Fourth Nuclear referendum should raise the salience of environmental issues and thus present

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<sup>69</sup>In recent interviews with Green Party activists this author found approximately half of respondents highly critical of this unofficial agreement.

an unprecedented window of opportunity for the GP to expand its support base. The PFP and TSU have also had the chance to gain support and remould their party image with their return to the Legislative Yuan in 2012. Overall the TSU appears to have been more successful as it has continued to focus on its anti China integration message. The PFP by contrast has struggled in developing a distinct party image.

The next major test for the small parties will be the 2014 local elections. These present an opportunity for the small parties to expand their representation. Firstly, the city and council elections are conducted under the MMD electoral system which of course operates in a semi-proportional manner. Secondly, the SMD executive elections offer the small parties the possibility of negotiating nomination agreements with the main parties. Although a more favorable political environment does not guarantee small party success, the prospects for a diverse party system are more promising than the small parties' nadir of 2010.

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