Perceived partisan heterogeneity in communication networks and changes in party choice in a national election: evidence from Taiwan

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Abstract

Partisan voters who change their voting choice on election day account for a small proportion of the electorate, but play a decisive role in a close election. Paul Beck's (2002) social-support theory of partisan defection states that a voter who perceives support for a candidate of the opposite party from his or her communication network is likely to defect. This study examines Beck's theory in the context of data collected in Taiwan after the 2004 presidential election. This election was marked by competition between two camps, making it the first campaign in Taiwan's history that resembled a two-party system. Besides providing an empirical test of the theory, this article shows that Pan-Green Camp supporters are more volatile than Pan-Blue Camp supporters, and it identifies the major factors associated with this pattern.

Ideally, individuals in a democracy are free to base their voting choices on their evaluation of the candidates. In practice, however, political scientists have found that voters are likely to be influenced by party identification because political parties play an important role in aggregating and shaping political preferences during electoral campaigns. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that voters in a democracy will seldom defect from their party identification when making electoral choices (for example, Cowden and McDermott, 2000; Goren, 2005; Johnston, 2006; Kroh and Selb, 2009; McDevitt, 2006; Sapiro, 2004).[1]

Recently, scholarly attention has been directed toward the existence of a small proportion of voters who do defect during an election. For example, in the 2000 US presidential election, 9.6 percent of voters leaning toward a political party voted for a candidate of the opposite party, and in Taiwan's 2004 presidential election, 3.8 percent voted for the opposite political camp. The small

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proportion of voters who engage in such preference changes may not play a significant role when one side has a substantial lead in the polls prior to the election; their influence becomes more significant, however, if the election is a close one. Robert Erikson, Michael MacKuen, and James Stimson (2002) acknowledge the influence of a small proportion of the electorate on election results in US elections. They argue that small differences in support for political parties at the individual level can lead to significant differences at the aggregate level.

Their findings suggest that informed partisan voters change their votes in a systematic manner, producing a rational net outcome at the macro-level, while the perceptions and behaviors of inattentive voters tend to cancel each other out, 'contributing to their disappearance from the macro-level picture' (Erikson et al., 2002: 432). This perspective of 'macropartisanship' depicts a static image of partisan stabilization over time at the macro-level, implying that in terms of election results, inattentive voters' choices matter less than the choices of the politically aware. Although this model incorporates a dynamic view of preference changes in the uninformed public, it does not explain the dynamics of vote changes that have been empirically shown to occur among politically aware partisans.

In the few studies that have explored why some partisan voters are more volatile than others in their choices during an electoral campaign season, heterogeneity within communication networks is one factor that has been fully examined. Following the rationale of studies conducted by researchers from Columbia University (for example, Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Zuckerman, 2005), when one's network of people who discuss politics is composed of individuals holding diverse political preferences, this political communication network is likely to weaken one's established partisan orientation. If this rationale is correct and well supported in the USA, how well does it explain preference changes in party choice in a different national context?

This article tests hypotheses derived from a theory of partisan defection developed in the context of US electoral politics. The results of this analysis contribute to our knowledge by showing the extent to which these theories explain Taiwan's electoral politics. Specifically, this article will show the extent to which communication networks influenced the changes in party preference that occurred in Taiwan's 2004 presidential election.

Taiwan has been moving toward a two-party democracy similar to that of the USA since 2000 – the year when the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) overturned the Kuo-Ming-Tang (KMT) (Buruma, 1996; Hao, 1996; Liu, 1995). Two political camps have emerged since that election: the Pan-Blue Camp and the Pan-Green Camp. The Pan-Blue Camp is composed of the Nationalist Party (KMT), the New Party (NP, which is also called the Chinese New Party (CNP) and was founded in August 1993), and the People's Friendly Party (PFP, which was founded in March 2000). The Pan-Green Camp is composed of the DPP and two smaller parties (the Taiwan Solidification Union (TSU), which was established in August 2001, and the Independence Party (IP), which was founded in October 1996). Those who identify with the Pan-Blue Camp hold that the Republic of China (ROC) remains constitutionally legitimate in Taiwan (meaning that although it does not represent all of China, it remains a publicly recognized country in the world) and believe that Taiwan should pursue democratic reunification with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in mainland China. In contrast, those who identify with the Pan-Green Camp emphasize Taiwan's nationality and independence (Niou and Paolino, 2003; Schubert, 2004; Wang, 2000).

Under the influence of competition between the two political camps since 2000, Taiwanese voters have become more aware of the polarization between these camps as well as of the links between national identification and political camp identification (Clark, 2005; Fell, 2004; Lee, 2005; Mattlin, 2004).[2] In the 2004 presidential election, Taiwanese voters essentially had two

choices, making it the first time in history that they had to choose between two political camps instead of multiple political parties.

Heterogeneity of communication networks and the perception of incongruence

Interpersonal political discussion has been recognized as a form of political participation and a channel through which an individual perceives political disagreement (Beck et al., 2002; Bennett et al., 2000; McLeod et al., 1996, 1999b). The concept of a network of political discussion in these studies consistently refers to the network of people with whom one discusses politics in daily life. Scholars have clarified the causal direction between network effects and political involvement, showing that the influence of communication networks on political involvement is greater than the reverse. They indicate that family and close friends are the major components of one's political discussion network (Huckfeldt et al., 1995; La Due Lake and Huckfeldt, 1998) and that they are related to discussion frequency, elaboration, and network diversity (Hively and Eveland, 2009).

Because messages with personal relevance presented by a trusted source are more likely to be accepted (Carmines and Huckfeldt, 1996; Granovetter, 1973; Huckfeldt, 2001; Miller and Krosnick, 2000; Petty and Cacioppo, 1981), people are inclined to talk to like-minded others, mostly family members (for example, Beck, 1991; Huckfeldt et al., 2002; Mutz, 2001; Pattie and Johnston, 1999, 2000, 2002; Roch et al., 2000; Scherer and Cho, 2003; Scheufele et al., 2004; Wyatt et al., 2000).

Subsequent research has found that political discussion networks lead people to attend public forums (both online and offline) and to respond to local policy changes (Arnold et al., 2000; McLeod et al., 1999a, 1999b; Roch et al., 2000; Scheufele, 2000). Recent findings further suggest that frequent interaction with network members can amplify the effects of internet campaign exposure (Nisbet and Scheufele, 2004) and reduce disagreement regarding candidate positions among those exposed to homogeneous networks (Feldman and Price, 2008), especially among people who experience disagreement in discussion (Lee, 2005). However, interacting with like-minded network members can polarize attitudes on controversial issues such as stem cell research (Binder et al., 2009).

Interacting with members of political discussion networks has an effect on one's propensity to vote for other parties' candidates. Zuckerman et al. (1994, 1998) studied the British elections of 1964–66, 1966–70, and 1970–74, as well as the US elections of 1956–60, and proposed *a structural theory of voting choice*. This theory suggests that voters who interact with network members who share a similar party identification and social background (such as class, ethnicity, and religion) are likely to make the same voting choices in adjacent elections. Pattie and Johnston's (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002) studies of British elections and the study by Liu et al. (1998) of voting behavior in New Zealand and Japan also support this theory.

Whereas the theory of Zuckerman et al. (1994) deals with the stability of voting choices across elections, Beck's (2002) *theory of social support* deals with partisan defection in a given election. Consistent with the logic of the *structural theory of voting choice* in terms of the impact of network heterogeneity on voting behavior, the theoretical linkage of Beck's *theory of social support* suggests that

> When the voter favors a candidate from the other party or from a third party, social support for that preference may be instrumental in converting that preference into a vote. Sometimes, under particular conditions, pressure of the social network can even go so far as to overcome individual preferences for another candidate. Defection from one's party or from the two-party mainstream is difficult in the

American two-party system, considering the many pressures that operate to suppress it. Support from personal discussants helps the voter to surmount these difficulties – in short, to encourage political defection. (Beck, 2002: 313)

As will be discussed more fully below, Beck's idea regarding partisan defection better describes changes in party choice during a campaign season than detachment from a psychological tie with a political party. Based on 1992 US presidential election data, which includes detailed information on the number of voters in favor of Bush, Clinton, and Perot, Beck found that the likelihood that a voter would vote for Ross Perot increased if that voter had at least one Perot supporter in his or her network of political discussion. Beck's examination of partisan defection in the 1992 election suggests similar findings: partisan defection is likely to occur if a partisan voter does not receive extensive social support from network members and if one or more network member supports a candidate from the opposite party. As Beck further suggests:

It is important for voters to have others in their immediate social environment who share their third-party proclivities. This can be thought of as positive reinforcement, 'pulling' the voter into a Perot vote in 1992. Defection from a party, on the other hand, seems to be motivated more by the push of a social setting that lacks support for the party of identification than the pull of discussants who like the opposition (2002: 329).

Research conducted by Zuckerman et al. and Beck suggests the following hypothesis: when voters perceive disagreements within their communication network, this has a positive influence on changes in party choice.[3] The null hypothesis is that there is no relationship between perceived social support and changes in party choice.

Other relevant explanations for changes in party choice

In addition to network heterogeneity, scholars have investigated a list of alternative variables that account for changes in party choice. These variables include partisan strength, parental socialization, genetic factors or heritability, personality (such as cognitive mobilization), perception of partisan dominance, perception of incumbency, retrospective views about the status of the economy, exposure to the mass media, exposure to social context (particularly, spouses and close friends), knowledge of other voters' partisan preferences, evaluation of candidate credibility, visibility and appeal (or favorable evaluations of the incumbent and challenger), favorable evaluations of the past governing performance of the opposing party, evaluation of incumbents' and challengers' stances on political issues, and incumbent performance evaluations regarding an issue (Alvarez et al., 2000; Bartle, 2003; Beck, 2002; Beck et al., 2002; Burbank, 1997; Fournier et al., 2003; Hatemi et al., 2009; Kenny, 1998; King, 2001; Kroh and Selb, 2009; Schmitt-Beck, 2003; Schmitt-Beck et al., 2006; Settle et al., 2009; Weisberg, 2002; Wekkin, 1991).

Among these variables, partisan strength and feelings about the candidates are the most important to consider in a model of partisan defection (Beck, 2002). Strong partisanship has been identified as a long-lasting and consistent stabilizer of voting choices (Krosnick, 1991). The stronger a voter's partisanship, the less likely he or she is to switch votes in consecutive elections (Burbank, 1997; Schickler and Green, 1997).

Other variables to consider include favorable evaluations of the incumbent or the challenger, favorable evaluations of the incumbent's performance regarding a certain issue, and retrospective views about the economy's status. It is expected that unfavorable evaluations of one's own candidate, favorable evaluations of the other party's candidate, and negative views about the status of the

economy would increase the likelihood of changing one's party choice in the voting booth (for example, Bartle, 2003; Beck, 2002; Fournier et al., 2003; King, 2001; Weisberg, 2002; Wekkin, 1991).

In short, the literature on changes in party choice suggests the following two groups of variables to consider when constructing a model: (1) social context variables, including the heterogeneity of communication networks and interactions with political party networks and social class networks, and (2) political-psychological variables, including partisan strength, perceptions of social support, perceptions of dominant parties, subjective evaluations of the candidates, and retrospective views on the status of the economy.

The sample, model, and measurement

The sample

The data used for this study were taken from Taiwan's Election and Democratization Study of the 2004 presidential elections (TEDS2004P, $N = 1823$).[4] The date of the election was 20 March 2004 and the survey was conducted between June and late September 2004.[5]

Note that the survey began approximately three months after election day. Considering the potential negative impact of this delay on the accuracy of respondents' preferences, the TEDS board added reminders such as 'In this presidential election ...' or 'During the presidential election this March ...' to the beginning of sections and questions throughout the questionnaire (seven times in the first third of the questionnaire, seven times in the middle third, and seven times in the last third). The consistent appearance of these phrases during the face-to-face survey was expected to help respondents accurately report the attitudes about issues, candidates, and parties that they held *during* the campaign season.[6]

The model

Given the main hypothesis that the likelihood of changes in party choice will increase when an individual perceives a higher level of heterogeneity within his or her communication network, a model of partisan defection is constructed as follows:

Logit $p = \beta_0 + \beta_1$ * perceived heterogeneity
$+ \beta_2$ * independent
$+ \beta_3$ * evaluation of Chen Shui-Bian
$+ \beta_4$ * support for the Pan-Blue Camp * Chen evaluation
$+ \beta_5$ * better economy
$+ \beta_6$ * worse economy

where logit $p = \log [p*(1 - p)]$, p is the expected probability of defection or changes in party choice, and $\beta_{1\sim11}$ are logit regression coefficients obtained through maximum likelihood estimation (MLE).

Measurement

The dependent variable. The measurement for the dependent variable (partisan defection or changes in party choice) is voting for a team of candidates from the opposite political camp, casting wasted ballots, or not turning out to vote. First, a respondent identifying with the Pan-Blue Camp (KMT, PFP, or NP) is coded as 1, while those identifying with the Pan-Green Camp (DPP, IP, or TSU) are

coded as 0. Second, a voter identifying with a party of the Pan-Blue Camp is coded as 0 if he or she voted for the KMT candidates Lien and Soong; he or she is coded as 1 if he or she voted for the DPP candidates Chen and Lu, cast a wasted ballot, or did not vote. Similarly, a voter identifying with a party of the Pan-Green Camp is coded as 0 if he or she voted for Chen and Lu and as 1 if he or she voted for Lien and Soong, cast a wasted ballot, or did not vote.

The measurement of partisan defection or changes in party choice is important when applying a US model to a non-US context. During a presidential election, US voters choose candidates from the two major political parties, while Taiwanese voters choose candidates from the two political camps. Moving across the line dividing political camps in Taiwan resembles defection from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party in the USA. Taiwanese voters perceive fewer differences between political parties within a political camp than across the camps. Given the clear ideological difference between pro-unification and pro-independence, a Taiwanese voter finds it easier to differentiate between the two political camps (either the Pan-Green Camp or the pan-blue Camp) than to differentiate parties within the same political camp. Moreover, it is important to clarify the concept of partisan defection: a voter who identifies with either the DPP or TSU (the Pan-Green Camp parties) might find it difficult to cast a vote against 'his or her' President Chen Shui-Bian. Defection, therefore, should not be limited to casting a ballot for Lien and Soong from the opposite political camp; instead, it is more reasonable to define the concept of defection as casting a ballot for Lien and Soong, casting a wasted ballot, *or* staying at home.[7]

It should be noted that only respondents who identified a partisan affiliation are included in this analysis. Respondents who identified with parties other than the six major parties ($N = 7$) and those who refused to answer or responded 'don't know' to the party identification question ($N = 686$) were recoded as missing. Hence, the number of observations analyzed was limited due to list-wise deletion; the interpretation of the logistic regression results, therefore, should not be applied to nonpartisan voters.

The independent variables. The measurement of network heterogeneity (the primary independent variable) presented here is consistent with that in Beck's (2002) model, in which a respondent was asked to name four to five discussants and then judge those discussants' voter preferences (Bush, Clinton, or Perot). In TEDS2004P, this indicator of the extent to which the respondent perceives disagreement from his or her communication networks was obtained in an indirect fashion. The following steps were used to create the variable of network heterogeneity and to probe the congruency of partisan preferences between respondents and their network members.

Three variables in TEDS2004P were used to create the variable of network heterogeneity: respondents' own partisan orientation, their perception of the level of agreement among their discussants (not counting the respondent), and the partisan preferences of network members (see the Appendix for wording). First, respondents were coded as 1 (that is, perceiving network heterogeneity) if (1) they reported some disagreement in their network members' partisan orientation and if (2) all of their network members held a preference (either on the side of the Pan-Green Camp or on the side of the Pan-Blue Camp) opposite to the respondent's partisan orientation (supporting the Pan-Blue Camp or the Pan-Green Camp, respectively). Next, consistent with Beck's (2002) coding scheme, respondents were coded as –1 if they perceived that their network members' party preferences were the same as their own.[8]

The control variables. The control variables drawn from TEDS2004P include partisan strength, subjective evaluation of candidates, and retrospective views about the status of the economy (a question about perceptions of dominant parties is not available in the dataset). The primary control variable

is partisan strength, which is measured by whether the respondent claims to be independent as opposed to identifying with the Pan-Blue Camp or the Pan-Green Camp.[9] It is expected that respondents who claim to be independent are more likely to defect than others. The second control variable is an 11-point (0–10) interaction scale for incumbent President Chen Shui-Bian. The third and fourth control variables (positive and negative views on the status of the economy in the previous year) are dummy variables. A theoretical expectation is that partisan defection or change in party choice is likely if the respondent claims to be an independent, if he or she disfavors the incumbent President Chen Shui-Bian, if he or she is a Pan-Blue Camp supporter, but favors Chen Shui-Bian, or if he or she believes that the economy fared poorly during Chen's administration.[10]

Network heterogeneity and changes in party choice

Table 1 presents the logistic regression results for the full or original model and the reduced model in which two insignificant variables (that is, positive and negative retrospective views about the status of the economy) are excluded. Overall, the perception of network heterogeneity within communication networks affects the likelihood of changes in party choice for both Pan-Blue and Pan-Green identifiers. The existence of disagreement within communication networks increases the possibility of partisan defection. This finding is consistent with Beck's (2002) theory of social support: when diverse political preferences are embedded in one's democratic life, an individual who disagrees with the majority will find psychological support from his or her communication network. A citizen will be more likely to vote against his or her established identification with a political camp if he or she has been presented with a diversity of preferences.

The signs of the coefficients of some control variables fit the expected outcome: respondents who claimed to be independent or who were not bound to any political camp were more likely to defect from their established party identification. This type of defection may also be associated with

Table 1. Models of Electoral Defection for the 2004 Taiwanese Presidential Election

Explanatory variables	A. Original model			B. Reduced model		
	B	SE	Sig.	B	SE	Sig.
(Intercept)	−0.559	1.171	0.6328	−0.357	1.089	0.7431
Perceived network heterogeneity	0.968*	0.410	0.0181	1.051**	0.402	0.0089
Independent/neutral	1.846***	0.526	0.0005	1.671***	0.491	0.0007
Supporting the Pan-Blue Camp	−4.281***	1.229	0.0005	−4.528***	1.144	0.0001
Evaluation of Chen Shui-Bian	−0.577**	0.190	0.0024	−0.601***	0.171	0.0004
Support for Blue * evaluation of Chen	0.590**	0.193	0.0023	0.616***	0.175	0.0004
Better economy	−0.380	0.760	0.6177	–	–	–
Worse economy	0.136	0.608	0.8227	–	–	–
Number of observations						
		638			722	
Nagelkerke R^2		0.285			0.274	
AIC		137.29			149.12	

Notes: *p < .05; **p <.01; ***p <.001. Cell entries for each variable are the unstandardized logit coefficient (B), its standard error (SE), and its two-tailed level of significance. Panel A contains the original model with explanatory variables adapted from Beck's (2002) model. Panel B contains additional control variables specific to the context of Taiwan.
Source: TEDS 2004.

strategic voting or dissatisfaction with a candidate nominated by another political party of one's own camp. Moreover, a positive evaluation of incumbent President Chen Shui-Bian by followers of the Pan-Green Camp significantly decreased the likelihood of defection, while respondents with negative views of Chen from this camp were more likely to defect.[11] Likewise, respondents who identified with the Pan-Blue Camp and viewed Chen positively were less likely to defect.

Neither positive nor negative impressions about the national economy in the past year significantly influenced the likelihood of partisan defection. This does not exclude, however, the indirect influence of economic variables. The lower AIC score in Panel A indicates that the original model, which includes economic variables, explains more variance in the dependent variable than Panel B. However, the exclusion of these two variables does not change the interpretation of the results.

The statistically significant and negative coefficient of 'supporting the Pan-Blue Camp' is worth noting; this is an unexpected finding. The direction of this coefficient suggests a difference between the supporters of the two political camps. Because identification with a political camp was treated as a dummy variable with those 'supporting the Pan-Green Camp' coded as 0 and those 'supporting the Pan-Blue Camp' coded as 1, this result suggests that Pan-Green supporters are more volatile or more likely to defect than Pan-Blue supporters.

The list-wise deletion that caused a significant decrease in the sample (831 in the dependent variable and 854 in the independent variable of perceived network heterogeneity) may raise concerns about the reliability of the regression results. Hence, multiple imputation analysis (Honaker et al., 2009; King et al., 2001) was conducted based on 10 multiply imputed datasets (each with a complete 1823 observations).[12] The regression results showed that the first two hypotheses (that perceiving network heterogeneity and being an independent influence changes in party choice) remained supported (at the .001 significance level). The coefficients of the other variables, however, became insignificant.

Differences between the supporters of the two camps

Although the coefficient of 'supporting the Pan-Blue Camp' was insignificant in the multiple imputation process, the potential difference between the supporters of the two camps identified in the original data (Table 1) can be further inspected by (1) dividing the dataset into two subsets by camp identification and (2) applying the above model to the two subsets.

Table 2 reports the regression results. Note that due to the division along the line of camp identification, the two associated variables ('supporting the Pan-Blue Camp' and the interaction term 'support for Blue * evaluation of Chen') must be dropped from the models before running the regression. The results shown in Table 2 suggest a pattern that distinguishes the supporters of the two camps regarding partisan defection. First, claiming independence or not being bound to any political camp explains the defection of Pan-Blue Camp supporters better than the other variables. Second, for Pan-Green supporters who defected and voted for Lien and Soong, a negative evaluation of Chen Shui-Bian and the perception that the economy had worsened explain the likelihood of defection better than network heterogeneity and the other variables. This comparison reveals that Pan-Blue supporters' propensity to defect is less associated with candidate evaluation than with their attachment to a political camp; Pan-Green supporters are influenced more by their subjective and negative evaluation of the candidate nominated by their political camp and the condition of the economy. In short, analysis based on this TEDS2004P sample suggests that Pan-Blue Camp supporters are more likely to change their party choice when they dislike the general image of the political camp, while Pan-Green supporters are more likely to change their party choice when they dislike the candidate and the economic situation.

Table 2. Models of Partisan Defection by Pan-Blue and Pan-Green Identification

Explanatory variables	A. Identifying with the Pan-Blue Camp			B. Identifying with the Pan-Green Camp		
	B	SE	Sig.	B	SE	Sig.
(Intercept)	−12.755	1136.854	0.9910	−0.312	1.162	0.7880
Network heterogeneity	8.890	1136.854	0.9938	0.726$^+$	0.440	0.0992
Independent/neutral	2.546**	0.851	0.0028	0.967	0.740	0.1911
Evaluation of Chen	0.020	0.058	0.7262	−0.607**	0.188	0.0012
Better economy	0.143	1.207	0.9058	−0.147	0.994	0.8823
Worse economy	−1.504	1.124	0.1810	1.882*	0.872	0.0308
Number of observations	318			320		
Nagelkerke R^2	0.358			0.364		
AIC	61.95			71.41		

Notes: $^+p < .1$; $^*p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$. Cell entries for each variable are the unstandardized logit coefficient (B), its standard error (SE), and its two-tailed level of significance.
Source: TEDS 2004.

The model in Table 2 was replicated based on the 10 imputed datasets. The results pertaining to the Pan-Blue Camp identifiers and the Pan-Green Camp identifiers are presented in Table 3 and Table 4, respectively. Horizontal comparisons of the significance of each variable across the data-sets suggest the following. First, it is easier to detect a pattern in Table 3 than in Table 4 regarding which variables explain the behavior of changing one's vote. Second, given the imputed datasets, network heterogeneity was found to be a likely significant factor in Pan-Blue Camp identifiers' vote changes: eight out of the ten models (excepting No. 3 and No. 10) in Table 3 and seven out of the ten models (excepting Nos 2, 5, and 10) in Table 4 suggest such a consistent pattern. Third, consistent with the above analysis, Pan-Blue Camp supporters are more likely to change their party choice when their partisanship is weakened, while Pan-Green supporters are more likely to change party choice when their image of the candidate is weakened.

Conclusion and discussion

In a classic debate in the study of voting behavior, scholars from the Columbia and Michigan schools sought the best explanatory variable to account for variance in voter choice. After decades

Table 3. Summary of the Significance of the Variables Based on the 10 Imputed Datasets (Pan-Blue Camp Identifiers)

Imputed dataset No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Network heterogeneity	***	*		*	**	**	**	**	*	+
Independent/neutral	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Evaluation of Chen	+			+						
Better economy										
Worse economy	**	*	**	**	*	**	**	**	**	+
AIC	171.0	195.8	183.4	152.7	148.0	177.7	165.4	185.0	185.8	195.0

Notes: $N = 564$; $+ p < .1$; $^*p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$.
Source: Imputed datasets derived from TEDS 2004P.

Table 4. Summary of the Significance of the Variables Based on the 10 Imputed Datasets (Pan-Green Camp Identifiers)

Imputed dataset No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Network heterogeneity	*	+	**	*	+	**	**	*	*	
Independent/neutral		*					***			
Evaluation of Chen	***		***	***	+	***			***	***
Better economy				+			*			
Worse economy	**	+	+		*			*		
AIC	142.0	175.7	157.1	128.3	138.2	168.0	187.8	169.8	195.5	152.9

Notes: N = 573; + $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.
Source: Imputed datasets derived from TEDS 2004P.

of investigation, a new consensus has emerged: both party identification and social context explain some aspects of political behavior. Party identification explains why citizens' voting preferences tend to be stable over time, and the heterogeneity of social context, particularly of communication networks, explains why party preferences sometimes change. This article attempts to examine a hypothesis about the impact of communication networks on electoral behavior; specifically, it examines the relationship between perceived network heterogeneity and change in party choice.

Theoretically consistent with other studies that empirically test this relationship (for example, Baker et al., 2006; Liu, 2006), this study contributes to the generalizability of the social-support theory of partisan defection by analyzing data external to the US context. In particular, this study finds that Beck's (2002) theory holds for Taiwan's 2004 presidential election.

Before discussing the implications for Taiwan's politics, it is important to discuss the issues of party identification and party choice. While it is reasonable to expect that voters seldom defect from their party identification when making electoral choices, empirical data reveal that a small proportion of partisan voters, including very weak, weak, and even strong partisans, decide not to support their candidates in presidential elections. Despite this empirical evidence, and following Campbell et al. (1960), many scholars of party identification (for example, Kaufmann et al., 2008) tend to take the assumption of stability for granted.

Consistent with this line of thought, Beck's concept of partisan defection pertains more to volatile changes in party choice during a campaign season than to voters abandoning psychological ties to a political party. Although Beck does not deal with party identification and party choice separately, future scholars might consider whether party identification is not as stable as was originally assumed (see Schmitt-Beck et al., 2006). Research on changes in party choice, including the present study, can be seen as an initial attempt to relax this assumption of stability by (1) acknowledging the stability of psychological attachment to a party, (2) simultaneously emphasizing the possibility that a small number of partisan voters may abandon their loyalty to a self-chosen political party, and (3) seeking possible explanations for such a phenomenon.

Empirically, this study contributes to a better understanding of voter behavior in a young democracy. The evidence from Taiwan contributes new knowledge to and aids in the reevaluation of the literature generated by the Columbia school on network effects. Network effects may not override the role of strong partisan identification in determining the process of preference stabilization, but it is evident that homogeneous networks in an Asian context may function as a buffer that strengthens voters' existing preferences. In other words, network heterogeneity partially offset the influence of strong partisanship in a presidential election in Taiwan.

This article also finds some systematic differences within the Taiwanese electorate. Pan-Green Camp supporters are more volatile than their Pan-Blue Camp counterparts in terms of partisan voting; this volatility is negatively associated with their evaluation of the incumbent from their camp and of economic conditions. This finding does not imply that Pan-Blue Camp supporters do not care about candidate performance or the economic situation during the campaign season. Instead, the finding suggests that Pan-Blue Camp supporters are more stable in their camp or party identification. Their attachment to their political camp seems to be less easily altered by events or conditions.

Three factors may explain the preference stability of voters who identify with the Pan-Blue Camp. First, the KMT has been the ruling party in Taiwan for at least four decades, and its national ideology has been transmitted through intergenerational socialization. In other words, the period of socialization that Pan-Blue Camp supporters have experienced is longer than that of Pan-Green supporters. Second, because the KMT has been the ruling party for decades, it is generally recognized as an instigator of Taiwan's modernization. This works to the advantage of the KMT and the Pan-Blue Camp in election campaigns, particularly in presidential elections. This long-established image is stronger in the minds of Pan-Blue Camp supporters. Third, the KMT and elites from the Pan-Blue Camp have been widely regarded as better negotiators with the People's Republic of China. Compared with their Pan-Green counterparts, Pan-Blue Camp supporters have greater confidence in their elites' ability to manage issues involving the PRC, so Pan-Blue supporters are less likely to change their party choices.

The 'defection' of Pan-Blue Camp supporters is explained by partisan strength, not network heterogeneity. The relatively short-term influence of the DPP during Chen Shui-Bian's administration from 2000 to 2004 seems to have played a role in driving Pan-Blue Camp identifiers to 'defect' because the DPP successfully established a new image of the Taiwanese regime in contrast to the 'Great China' image that some very weak or weak Pan-Blue identifiers found obsolete.

The relative volatility of Pan-Green supporters can be attributed to dramatic gaps between their evaluations of Chen and Lu in 2004 and their high expectations of Chen and Lu when the DPP first came to power in 2000. Supporters of the Pan-Green Camp are less confident about their ideology and the constitutional order proposed by the Pan-Green parties; they are more likely to defect when candidate performance and the economic situation are evaluated negatively. In sum, network heterogeneity explains partisan defection in Taiwan to a great extent, but the defection of Pan-Green supporters is more subject to their evaluation of Chen than the defection of Pan-Blue supporters.

The possible explanations provided above require further empirical exploration. In addition to Taiwan's economic downturn that began in 2000, a series of political news events, including corruption scandals, have undermined Pan-Green supporters' confidence. Focusing on theoretical variables, this article has not examined other possible factors that could undermine the confidence of Pan-Green supporters. Future research is also needed to test the model presented in this article in other Asian contexts, particularly in presidential elections. It would also be worthwhile to look for further explanations of the behavioral differences between the identifiers of the two political camps in Taiwan.

Note that the interpretation of the findings in this study is limited due to the nature of the dataset. Although this study was initially inspired by a theoretical puzzle, it is limited by the fact that it was difficult to obtain all the variables specified in the relevant studies. For example, the measurement of the primary independent variable (network heterogeneity within a respondent's political communication networks) is narrower in this study than the original concept implies. In this study, a network refers to family members and close friends, whereas elsewhere it includes all types of possible discussants, including co-workers and people met in church, in clubs, online, and so on. Moreover, the measurement of changes in party choice or partisan defection is less straightforward

in the Taiwanese context than in the US context. Due to these constraints, the results must be inter-preted with caution.

Nevertheless, the present study should promote a fuller exploration of the original theory of partisan defection. That theory was developed in the USA, where the two-party system is well developed. In Taiwan, while two distinct camps have been established, the pattern of partisan defection seems to vary across the camp line: Pan-Green Camp supporters seem to be more vola-tile. Future research might examine the extent to which the partisan defection theory applies to partisans of a young political party such as the DPP. This implies that a study of Taiwanese poli-tics at a single point in time will suffice to modify the theory. Long-term observations should be conducted regarding when and how the theory explains the behavior of partisan supporters of a relatively new political party or political camp and the volatility of their party identification.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the scope of the present study is limited to partisan voters. Future research should study the volatility and consistency of so-called independent voters. Doing so will advance our knowledge about whether and how this theory holds for nonpartisan voters in contexts both within and outside the USA.

Appendix

Table A1. Details of Variable Measurement

	Variable coding scheme
Dependent variable Partisan defection	1 = a respondent's vote was *inconsistent* with his/her party identification (VP1B) (i.e., an identifier of the DPP/TSU/IP voted for Lien and Soong or an identifier of the KMT/PFP/NP voted for Chen and Lu) or the respondent cast a wasted ballot or did not turn out to vote. 0 = otherwise.

Independent variables
    Perceived partisan
    heterogeneity
	Step 1: Identifying those exposed to heterogeneous networks and those exposed to homogeneous networks.
	VB1B. *'Do those people with whom you often discuss politics support the same political party?'*
	Recoding: missing = 'completely the same' or 'mostly the same'; 1 = 'some', 'quite a bit', or 'completely different'.

	Step 2: Identifying the voter preferences of homogeneous network members. For those in VB1B answering 'completely the same' and 'mostly the same', reviewers were instructed to ask: VB1C. *'What party do they support?'* Recoding: 1 = KMT, NP, or PFP; 0 = DPP, IP, or TSU.
	Step 3: Identifying those who perceived network homogeneity. VP1B. *'Our country has several important political parties, including the KMT, DPP, PFP, NP, IP, and TSU, which one do you lean toward?'* Recoding: 1 = identifying the KMT, NP, PFP, or the Pan-Blue Camp in general; 0 = identifying the DPP, TSU, IP, or the Pan-Green Camp in general.
	Based on the information above, a new variable is created so that −1 = perceiving that network members hold the same party preference as the respondent; 1 = perceiving at least some disagreement in their communication networks (includes individuals whose network members hold completely opposite party preferences).

Table A1. (Continued)

	Variable coding scheme
Being neutral	VP03. *'In this presidential election, some people belong to the Pan-Green Camp, while some belong to the Pan-Blue Camp. How do you place yourself in the green–blue spectrum?'* 1 = neutral; 0 = others ('dark blue', 'light blue', 'dark green', 'light green').
Better national economy	VD02. *'Would you say that Taiwan's economy is getting better than the previous year (2003), getting worse, or hasn't changed either way?'* 1 = better; 0 = otherwise.
Worse national economy	VD02. *'Would you say that Taiwan's economy is getting better than the previous year (2003), getting worse, or hasn't changed either way?'* 1 = worse; 0 = otherwise.
Evaluation of Chen Shui-Bian	K11A. *'People feel differently about whether the two teams of candidates could lead this country well in the coming four years. Please give 10 if you feel most favorable toward the candidate. Zero means you feel least favorable toward the candidate, and 5 means neutral. What do you think about Chen Shui-Bian?'*

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. The conventional definition of party identification is based on the assumption of stability for use as an explanatory variable for studying the response variables of political behavior (Campbell et al., 1960: 112). Given this definition of party identification, as one reviewer of this article pointed out, researchers of political behavior tend to ignore the possibility that party identification itself can change. However, this definition has recently been subjected to close examination (see Kaufmann et al., 2008). Research on partisan defection, including the present study, is derived from a more relaxed assumption about identification with a political group (that is, one acknowledging the stability of psychological attachment, but emphasizing the possibility that some members of the partisan electorate may change their loyalty to a self-chosen political party) and aims to find possible explanations for such a phenomenon.

2. According to *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960), party identification is defined as a psychological or affective tie to a political party regarded as a group. The measurement of this concept rests fundamentally on self-classification, that is, 'Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?' (Campbell et al., 1960: 122). Compared with the established and stable party system of the USA, political parties in Taiwan are relatively new and rather recent political phenomena. Mattlin (2004) indicates that the structure of political parties and how they function in Taiwan's politics is different from the US context. However, if we look at the individual level and observe Taiwanese voters following the definition of party identification put forth by Campbell et al. (1960), we see that people in Taiwan who identify with the KMT and DPP are similar to US voters who identify with the Republican Party and the Democratic Party in terms of the stability of party attachment (see Tsai et al., 2008).

3. This hypothesis is congruent with the hypothesis proposed by Beck (2002: 312): 'Voters are more inclined to vote for an independent (or third-party) candidate or to defect to the other party's candidate, ceteris paribus, when this behavior is supported in their social setting.'

4. Data analyzed in this article were collected by the research projects of TEDS 2004, which was directed by Huang Siou-Duan and completed by a team of scholars in Taiwan. The Election Study Center of National

Chengchi University is responsible for the data distribution. The author appreciates the assistance of the institute and the aforementioned individuals in providing data. The views expressed herein are the author's own. The data is available online at http://www.tedsnet.org.

5. Student interviewers were essential to the TEDS project. Recruited student interviewers were available for training and the conducting of their assigned survey work only during their summer vacation (from June to September). Although the TEDS project used reminders to lower the potential negative effect of this post-election survey on data quality, evaluating the effectiveness of this treatment is beyond the scope of this study.

6. Like most relevant studies addressing network effects on voting behavior (for example, Huckfeldt et al., 2004), this study is no exception in employing a post-election survey as a tool for theory testing. Although the issue of biased post-election responses has not been discussed in these studies and goes beyond the scope of this study, it should be acknowledged that respondents may have reported their attitudes at the time of the interview instead of their attitudes during the campaign season. However, if this were indeed the case and all respondents reported their after-election preferences, one might expect the effect of network heterogeneity on changes in party choice to have changed little after Taiwan's 2004 presidential election season. In other words, this sample-time bias should not be apparent. The unsuccessful assassination attempt on Chen Shui-Bian and Annette Lu on 19 March 2004, one day before election day, incited a high level of tension between supporters of the two camps; this unease lasted for several months after the election. This crisis aroused global uncertainty about Taiwan's democracy and has been widely perceived as a cause of the current political polarization in Taiwan. Although I found no significant effect of this event on partisan defection (using the variable 'whether or not this assassination was the most important issue during the campaign'), it is reasonable to expect that all partisan respondents interviewed during this period were extremely unlikely to misreport their vote choice and their party identification due to memory loss. Ultimately, information regarding the dependent and the primary independent variables should be consistent with those that would have been collected during the campaign season.

7. The pattern of the results (the significance and the direction of coefficients) of the regression analysis using this measurement (to be reported below) was found to be consistent with an analysis applying the conventional and simpler measurement of partisan defection, that is, Pan-Blue supporters voting for Chen and Lu and Pan-Green supporters voting for Lien and Soong are coded as 1, otherwise 0 is coded.

8. Note that this measurement of political communication networks is limited to family members and close friends. Although previous studies identified earlier in this article indicate that network members are more likely to be family members and close friends, this TEDS measurement, like the similar survey questions used in the previous US studies, refers to a narrower definition of this concept. Future studies should use questions that allow respondents to recall weak-tie work members. Moreover, the survey questions do not have detailed questions about communication networks (for example, the size of the network, the number of network members supporting a specific candidate, and detailed backgrounds of political discussants) and some other control variables identified in the literature and in this article, such as partisan socialization, the perception of the dominant party, evaluations of competence, the candidates' stances on issues and their ideology, issue importance, and expectation of winning (see Beck et al., 2002; Burbank, 1997; Coleman, 2004; Fournier et al., 2003). Whether the inclusion of these variables would eliminate the explanatory power of network heterogeneity on the variance of the likelihood of partisan defection requires further investigation.

9. There are two reasons to use this variable as an alternative to the conventional variable of partisan strength (VP1C). First, using the conventional partisan strength variable would sacrifice 142 (22.2 percent) observations from the regression analysis. An explanation for this is that individuals who hold a strong

partisan affiliation are viewed negatively in Taiwan, a mentality that can lead most TEDS respondents to hesitate to respond or talk about their true partisan strength in a face-to-face interaction. Second, for consistency, using strength of camp identification is more appropriate than strength of specific party identification in the present study.

10. Note that variables regarding news media use (that is, the frequency of accessing TV, newspapers, talk radio, and the internet one week before the election) were considered and examined during the regression, but the inclusion of these variables did not change any of the results presented in this article, and none of the coefficients of these variables is statistically significant at the .05 level. Future researchers addressing media effects are encouraged to explore the theoretical foundations of this non-effect.

11. A further examination of the multicollinearity of the two models suggests no statistically significant correlation between evaluations of Chen and retrospective views about the status of the national economy. This means that a respondent's negative evaluation of Chen cannot simply be attributed to his or her own view of the economy.

12. Variables included in the multiple imputation process are those used in the analysis stage, that is, the variables presented in Table 1 and those variables that will help in the imputation model, including party identification (VP1B), voter choice (VH1B), attendance at community meetings (VB08), partisan strength (VP1A and VP1C), the perception of the importance of the 19 March 2004 assassination attempt and Chen Yo-hao's scandal prior to the election (VR01), the frequency of discussing politics (VB01), evaluation of the incumbent president (VE01) and his administration (VE02), religious affiliation (VS07), internal efficacy (VC01), external efficacy (VC02), and time spent accessing the TV (VA01), radio news (VA1B), newspapers (VA1D), and the internet (VA1C). Empirical (ridge) priors, which are used where there is extensive missing data and which may cause results to be highly dependent on the choice of the imputation model, were set to nine (or 0.5 percent of the 1823 observations).

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