Vote for the Future: Prospective Issue Voting on Independence-Unification in the Case of Taiwan

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Dterminants of Individual Vote Choice

- Incumbent’s economic performance in the past
- Who is capable of leading a better economy in the near future
- Various candidates’ issue positions
  - Usually depends on which issue(s) is(are) more valent.
- Reputation of the party
The 2016 General Election

- Tsai Ing-wen (Democratic Progressive Party, DPP) won the election by majority (56.12%)
  - DPP is traditionally a pro-independence party
  - DPP also won the majority in the Legislative Yuan (seat share = 60.18%)

- Other candidates (Eric Chu from KMT and James Soong from PFP) are considered pro-unification
Tsai and DPP’s electoral victory could be attributed to:

- Bad economic performance by Ma Ying-jeou
- Belief that Tsai will engineer a better economy
- Disagreement over KMT and Ma’s cross-strait economic integration policies (pro-unification policies)
- Increasing support over independence among Taiwanese citizens
Do voters’ *FUTURE* issue attitudes affect their vote choices?
Classical Explanations of Vote Choice

- **Economic voting theory:**
  - Retrospective economic voting
  - Prospective economic voting

- **Issue voting theory:**
Prospective Issue Voting

- Similar to the prospective economic voting (vote for a better future)
- But focus on other issue domains.
  - e.g., health care, same-sex marriage, EU integration, independence-unification.
The Formation of Prospective Issue Position

- **Feasibility**
  - Individual’s belief and evaluation of the likelihood of a specific policy/condition in the future.

- Factors explaining the current issue position
Hypotheses

- **H1**: Individuals who have stronger belief in the feasibility of a particular issue/policy will be more likely to support such issue/policy prospectively.
- **H2**: Individuals with higher support over a particular issue/policy prospectively will more likely to vote for the candidate/party which aligns with such issue/policy position.
Country Selection

- Taiwan

- A significant issue that divides the Taiwanese society: unification-independence.
Data

- The 2014 & 2015 Taiwan National Security Survey
- Focus on 2014 and 2015 waves because:
  - Measurement of prospective issue position
  - The question on vote choice
- 2,162 valid respondents (2014: 1,091; 2015: 1,071)
Differentiating Prospective/Current Issue Position: DVs

P. Tondu: “For the future of the cross-strait relation, which statement do you agree on?”
- Taiwan and China are moving toward unification (0)
- Taiwan will eventually be independent (1)

C. Tondu: “Which of the following statement is closer to your opinion?”
- Unification APAP (0)
- Status quo–pro-unification (0)
- Status quo forever (0)
- Status quo–independence or unification depending on the future situation (0)
- Status quo–pro-independence (1)
- Independence ASAP (1)
Differentiating Prospective/Current Issue Position: IVs

- Likelihood of independence (-10 to 10)
- US help (1 to 4)
  - “If the declaration of independence results in a cross-strait warfare, will the US militarily assist Taiwan?”
- Protect Taiwan (1 to 4)
  - “If the declaration of independence results in a cross-strait warfare, will Taiwan be capable of defending itself?”
- Tension between CS and its impact on economy (1 to 3)
- Improve CS economic interdependency (0, 1)
- Worries for CS under DPP (1 to 4)
Vote Choice: DV

“Who will you vote for in the 2016 presidential election?”

- Tsai Ing-wen (1)
- All other candidates (0)
Vote Choice: IVs

- P. Tondu (0, 1)
- C. Tondu (0, 1)
- Retrospective economic evaluation (1 to 3)
- Prospective economic evaluation (1 to 3)
  - Inclusion of other demographic variables does not significantly change the findings
## Summary Statistics

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<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>P.Tondu</td>
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<td>0.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>C.Tondu</td>
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<td>Vote Tsai</td>
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<td>Retrospective economic evaluation</td>
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<td>Likelihood of independence</td>
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<td>CS under DPP</td>
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</table>
Classification and regression tree analysis (CART) through the generalized method of moments (GMM)
- Decision tree leaning model (machine learning)
- No distributional assumption
- Data sensitive/driven
- Provide conditional estimates
DV = P. Tondu
$DV = C.Tondu$
DV = Vote Tsai
Findings and discussion

- The formations of prospective and current issue positions are statistically different
  - Feasibility (US help) is a positive predictor for prospective tondu position, but negative for current tondu position
  - Replacing US help with the likelihood of war if Taiwan declares independence results in similar findings
- Both prospective and current issue positions explain vote choice
Implications

- Prospective issue voting needs to be taken into account when analyzing voting behavior in countries where significant issue domains other than economy exist.
- More theoretical and empirical works to disentangle prospective and current issue positions.
- Applications of machine learning in the field of political behavior.
Thank you very much!

- Comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated!