

## Movement Parties in Taiwan, 1987–2016

### *A Political Opportunity Explanation*

#### ABSTRACT

This article examines the development of “movement parties” in Taiwan by applying the political opportunity perspective to understand how external conditions impacted their electoral path. We explain the rise and fall of movement parties by changes in electoral system, level of movement activism, and the permeability of the DPP.

**KEYWORDS:** movement parties, political opportunity, electoral system, Sunflower Movement, Taiwan

IN JANUARY 2016, TAIWAN’S DEMOCRATIC PROGRESSIVE PARTY (DPP) won the presidential election and the legislative majority, marking the first time that the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party, KMT) lost control of both the executive and legislative branches of the government. In the wake of this landmark landslide, scholarly attention mostly focused on the future development of the two major parties. With a larger-than-expected electoral mandate, will the DPP government secure a peaceful relationship with China without accepting the terms dictated by Beijing? The KMT had ruled post-war Taiwan except for eight years, in 2000–07; however, the recent disastrous defeat prompted an acute existential crisis, which cast doubt on whether the KMT could manage a political comeback. True, the subsequent evolution of the two mainstream parties will largely shape the contour of Taiwan’s politics. Nevertheless, the 2016 election also witnessed the triumphal debut of the New Power Party (Shidai Liliang, NPP) as the third-largest party in the

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legislature by winning five seats, surpassing the People First Party and the Taiwan Solidarity Union. The NPP originated from a plethora of political activism energized by the Sunflower Movement in early 2014, in which a student-led protest disrupted the Legislative Yuan for more than three weeks. The spectacular transformation of illegal legislature occupiers into elected lawmakers testifies to the unusual resilience of Taiwan's democratic institutions.

As with the Spanish Podemos and the Greek Syriza, the NPP's success demonstrated how massive anti-government contention could engender a major reconfiguration of the political landscape. This article uses the concept of "movement party" to understand the particular process of how social-movement activism surges and reshapes the agenda of national politics. In Taiwan's context, the NPP represents the culmination of nearly three decades of effort by civil society activists to elect their own representatives, rather than relying on the sponsorship of more established politicians. We review their successive attempts since the late 1980s in order to pinpoint the conditions conducive to the NPP's success.

Moreover, a closer look at the development of Taiwan's movement parties sheds light on a contemporary theoretical issue in political sociology as a growing awareness emerges that the interaction between social movements and political parties should be brought back into the research agenda. Both involve organized and sustained activism to promote or resist social change via the multiple channels of the modern state.<sup>1</sup> Taiwan's two mainstream parties, for instance, were not averse to unruly protests, especially when they were out of power. That the DPP hailed from the pro-democracy movement easily explains its proclivity for protest activism, as evidenced in its support for the Sunflower Movement once the protestors had occupied the legislature. The KMT also appeared willing to support or mobilize protests as long as they served the political purpose at hand. The KMT's involvement in the 2006 Red-Shirt Army movement against the DPP President Chen Shui-bian was a noticeable case. Less than two weeks after the new DPP government was inaugurated in May, the KMT staged a protest rally of pig farmers to oppose the importation of American pork.<sup>2</sup> The received wisdom, however,

1. Jack Goldstone, "More Social Movements or Fewer? Beyond Political Opportunity Structures to Relational Field," *Theory and Society* 33.3/4 (July 2004): 333–365.

2. Central News Agency, May 13, 2016, <<http://goo.gl/ugn9zq>>, accessed June 28, 2016.

tends to adopt a polarized perspective of political parties as institutional and rational, while social movements are extra-institutional and disruptive.<sup>3</sup>

The insufficient attention to movement–party interaction in part originates from the focus on electoral studies in political science and on social movements in sociology. Discipline-based specialization promotes in-depth and accumulated knowledge at the expense of neglecting overlapping areas, so that students of political parties fail to embed parties in the “dynamic political interrelationships with state and society.”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, there are worries about the narrowing of the intellectual horizon with social-movement studies that focus on mobilization only, rather than posing larger questions about the formation of political identity.<sup>5</sup> McAdam and Tarrow, two leading scholars who shaped the contemporary study of contentious politics, have acknowledged that they overlooked the role of political parties, urging that more attention be paid to the “reciprocal relationship between elections and social movements.”<sup>6</sup>

This article examines the successive attempts to organize movement parties in Taiwan since the waning of authoritarian control. We identify the level of movement activism and the permeability of mainstream parties as two facilitating opportunities for launching the political project of organizing movement parties, if not for their electoral success. To put it simply, social-movement activists are more likely to form their own parties when (1) street protests are intense and effective and (2) established parties are not amenable to letting the movements exert influence from within. In addition, as will be observed, (3) changes in the electoral system play a critical role in shaping the movements’ campaign strategies.

In South Korea’s 1987 transition to democracy, militant social movements and the personality-based opposition parties followed parallel trajectories. Taiwan’s pattern witnessed a closer interaction between them.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless,

3. Diarmuid Maguire, “Opposition Movements and Opposition Parties: Equal Partners or Dependent Relations in the Struggle for Power and Reform,” in *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspective on States and Social Movements*, ed. J. Craig Jenkin and Bert Klandermans, 199–298 (London: UCL Press, 1955).

4. Stephanie L. Mudge and Anthony S. Chen, “Political Parties and the Sociological Imagination: Past, Present and Future Directions,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 40 (July 2014): 305–330.

5. Andrew G. Walder, “Political Sociology and Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (August 2009): 393–412.

6. Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow, “Ballots and Barricades: on the Reciprocal Relationship between Elections and Social Movements,” *Perspectives on Politics* 8.2 (June 2010): 529–542.

7. Yoonkyung Lee, “Diverging Patterns of Democratic Representation in Korea and Taiwan: Political Parties and Social Movements,” *Asian Survey* 54.3 (May/June 2014): 419–444.

there is an enduring tension between movement activists and the opposition, as the latter has often abandoned its movement allies for political exigencies. Taiwan's movement activists are constantly frustrated by their unfaithful political sponsors, and there exists a group of unrepresented constituencies that would like to vote for more uncompromisingly progressive candidates than the DPP nominees.

### THE RISE OF MOVEMENT PARTIES

The main business of mainstream parties in democracies across the world consists of winning office through electoral campaigns. For this paramount purpose, party platforms need to be flexible to accommodate ever-changing circumstances without appearing to abandon their core constituencies. Anthony Downs describes the behavior of mainstream parties, which “do not gain office in order to carry out certain preconceived policies” but instead “formulate policies” to obtain power.<sup>8</sup> For mainstream parties, ideologies, platforms, and policies are secondary to the imperative of electoral viability.

Movement parties follow a contrasting logic since they embody a particular cause and their electioneering is often the extension of protest activism. They are based more on core values since their target constituencies form a particular community, in clear distinction from mass voters. Hence, nascent movement parties seldom cater to the median voter, but instead mobilize minority niche voters who are either victims of social injustices or ideological followers of the movement's cause. Having successfully established their initial footing, movement parties face a tactical dilemma of whether to become more mainstream. The nineteenth-century European social democrats started with the socialist program of nationalizing the means of production, and yet the need to secure the support of non-worker voters necessitated a moderate turn.<sup>9</sup> The European green parties followed a similar route as their realistic wing gained ascendancy over the fundamentalists' insistence on “grass-roots democracy” to increase their electoral competitiveness.<sup>10</sup>

8. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, 137 (New York: Prentice Hall, 1957).

9. Adam Przeworski and John Sprague, *Paper Stones: A History of Electoral Socialism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

10. Herbert Kitschelt, *The Logic of Party Formation: Ecological Parties in Belgium and West Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

Understanding that the meaning of “social movements” varies in different contexts, this article adopts a narrower definition to exclude those collective actions that aim at changing the nature of the polity, for instance a democratic movement, or the status of statehood, which in Taiwan’s context includes pro-independence and pro-unification (with China) movements. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan maintain that (1) democratic consolidation means that democracy has become behaviorally, attitudinally, and constitutionally “the only game in town” and (2) democracy requires the prior existence of statehood.<sup>11</sup> Applying these insights, we argue that (to the first point) Taiwan became a consolidated democracy in 1996, when the first presidential election by popular vote took place. Prior to that, the DPP, with its lineage from the pro-democratic movement, had virtually given up the tactics of mass mobilization by concentrating on electioneering after the full legislative election in 1992. Hence, at least after the mid-1990s, the DPP and other pro-democratic forces could no longer be described as “movement parties.”

Concerning the second point, Taiwan has maintained a well-functioning statehood throughout the postwar era, although the international aspect of sovereignty has remained contested. There existed political forces that focused primarily, if not exclusively, on elevating Taiwan’s de facto independence to de jure (e.g., pro-independence parties such as the Taiwan Solidarity Union) or explicitly endorsed the goal of “peaceful unification of China.”<sup>12</sup> The reasons to discount these pro-independence and pro-unification parties are linked to the fact that almost none of them identified themselves as “social movements.” With the above delimitation in mind, we use “movement parties” to refer to organized electioneering that promoted reforms in labor, gender, human rights, the environment, and other issues that had conventionally proceeded through non-electoral channels.<sup>13</sup>

11. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 5, 17–19 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

12. In 2008–14 there emerged more than 80 newly registered parties that embraced the pro-unification agenda, although very few of them maintained a noticeable public presence. *Liberty Times*, July 22, 2014, <<http://goo.gl/J6Giql>>, accessed June 28, 2016.

13. Incidentally, all the movement parties discussed here pursue a liberal and progressive agenda. In the 2016 legislative election, a party opposed to same-sex marriage (Faith and Hope League) joined the fray, which arguably marked the historical entrance of conservative Christians into electoral politics. This article chooses not to include this case because (1) it does not understand itself as a “movement” and (2) there is no sign of continuing activities after its initial failure.

To understand why social-movement activists decide to form their own parties, we resort to the concept of “political opportunity,” or the ever-changing features of a political system that “encourages people to engage in contentious politics.”<sup>14</sup> The concept was originally used to explain the emergence of social movements (and later, their outcomes); more recently, there have been attempts to broaden the term’s analytical scope to the European movement parties, such as left-libertarian parties<sup>15</sup> and populist parties.<sup>16</sup>

There has been a persistent debate over the analytical utility of “political opportunities.” The classical formation of “political opportunity structure” is criticized for structural bias and for an implied determinism that leaves too little room for subjective agency.<sup>17</sup> Taking heed of this criticism, this article uses “political opportunity” (without “structure”) to consider more possible interactions between institutions and movement activism. We will focus on three political opportunities—the electoral system, the level of movement mobilization, and the permeability of mainstream parties—to understand how Taiwan’s movement activists ventured into the less familiar terrain of electoral politics.

### Electoral Systems

According to the now-canonical Duverger’s law, single-member district (SMD) rule is conducive to two-party systems, and proportional representation (PR) encourages multi-party systems. An SMD system brings about a winner-takes-all situation, so the contending politicians are motivated to cooperate for a winning coalition. In contrast, PR exerts a centrifugal effect, as small parties can focus exclusively on niche voters and win offices without securing a majority. Since movement parties are necessarily small in the beginning, PR obviously offers a more favorable environment for them than the SMD method.

14. Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd ed., 32 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

15. Kent Redding and Jocelyn S. Viterna, “Political Demands, Political Opportunities: Explaining the Differential Success of Left-Libertarian Parties,” *Social Forces* 78.2 (December 1999): 491–510.

16. Mario Diani, “Linking Mobilization Frame and Political Opportunities: Insights from Regional Populism in Italy,” *American Sociological Review* 61.6 (December 1996): 1053–69.

17. See e.g. Jeffrey Goodwin and James J. Jasper (eds.), *Contention in Context: Political Opportunities and Emergence of Protest* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

In Taiwan, all the elections for administrative and executive positions, including president, city and county mayors, township mayors, and village and ward heads, use the SMD rule, which explains why movement parties seldom mount bids in these elections since the probability of winning is minimal. For the election of lawmaking representatives such as district legislators (before 2008), national assembly representatives (before 1996), city and county councilors, and township representatives, Taiwan adopts an unusual system of “single nontransferable voting in multimember districts” (SNTV). This system selects more than one winner, and consequently candidates rarely need to obtain a majority to win a seat. This system in Taiwan is closer to PR, particularly in the larger districts, as the greater degree of proportionality means minority groups’ votes are less likely to be “wasted.”<sup>18</sup> As the following sections will show, most of Taiwan’s movement activists’ electioneering targets these SNTV seats.

Taiwan introduced PR in the first open election of the Legislative Yuan in 1992, with 36 out of 161 seats distributed according to the percentage of district votes. The share of PR seats changed in subsequent elections, alternating roughly between 20% and 30%. Only those parties that received more than 5% of nationwide votes were eligible for the proportional seats. Elsewhere in the world the PR system generally favors movement parties. The German Greens, for instance, are called an “artifact of the five percent clause.”<sup>19</sup> Yet, Taiwan’s PR system still remained a formidable challenge for movement parties until 2008. Since the percentage was based on the sum of district votes, a movement party would have to field candidates in nearly every district to be a bona fide contender.

The 2008 reform simultaneously brought about opportunities and challenges. Aside from six seats for indigenous peoples, 73 district seats were changed from SNTV to SMD, making it much more difficult for movement parties to survive amid the ruthless duel between DPP and KMT candidates. However, although the 5% threshold remained, 34 proportionate seats were now decided by a second ballot (a “party vote”), and all parties that nominated at least 10 district candidates could contend. Consequently Taiwan’s

18. John Fuh-sheng Hsieh, “The SNTV System and its Political Implications,” in *Taiwan’s Electoral Politics and Democratic Transition: Riding the Third Wave*, ed. Hung-Mao Tien, 198–199 (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996).

19. Helmut Wiesenthal, *Realism in Green Politics: Social Movements and Ecological Reform in Germany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 92.

movement parties began to set their eyes on the PR seats of the Legislative Yuan, even though their prospects in district elections were greatly diminished.

Dafydd Fell characterizes Taiwan's party system as relatively "open to new entrants," as evidenced by a string of successful small parties, including the New Party (1993), the People First Party (2000), and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (2001).<sup>20</sup> However, movement parties do not enjoy success because they rarely have charismatic leaders. All the hitherto viable small parties were initiated by professional politicians and started as secessionist parties out of the DPP or the KMT. Fell calls them "splinter parties" from Taiwan's green and the blue camps and uses the term "challenger parties" to identify the movement parties analyzed in this paper.<sup>21</sup>

Taiwan's electoral system and its evolution offered different configurations over time of access points for movement activists, and they tended to launch their campaigns in SNTV elections and, after 2008, in PR elections. The electoral system had an impact on movement parties, less because they were encouraged to join the election, but more in the types of elections they thought they had a decent chance of winning. In other words, it explained the "how" of movement parties, but not the "why."

### **The Level of Movement Mobilization**

Movement parties emerge when movement activists decide strategically to continue their activism "by other means." Social movements usually realize their political goals by exerting their "influence" rather than obtaining "power" directly. Thus, the decision to convert their influence into votes often comes from an optimistic assessment of electoral success. In Taiwan, an electoral campaign is a costly venture, as candidates are expected to pay the expenses as well as a registration fee, which is refundable only if the candidate receives a certain percentage of the votes. Potential supporters are generally disinclined to cast their votes for candidates with dim prospects of winning. Therefore, the tidal surge of movement mobilization presents a political

20. Dafydd Fell, *Government and Politics in Taiwan*, 107 (London: Routledge, 2012).

21. Dafydd Fell, "The Battle for Third Place: Prospects for Taiwan's Small Parties in Local Elections," China Policy Institute Blog of Nottingham University, November 24, 2014, <<http://googl/kU67Z4>>, accessed April 30, 2015.

opportunity when it can muster recognizable leaders, widened participation, and media attention—the critical resources for organizing movement parties.

Previous studies have identified the following trajectory of Taiwan's social movements:

1. Popular upsurge (1987–92), when the removal of martial law in 1987 released pent-up grievances and engendered a spiral of radical protests.
2. Institutionalization (1993–99), as the democratized government began to address some movement demands and legalize participatory channels. Social movements took a moderate turn and became legitimate political actors.
3. Incorporation (2000–07), as the advent of the DPP government widened institutional access for social movement activists. As some movement organizations obtained the status of regime partners, other organizations became disillusioned and frustrated by the DPP's gradual gravitation toward conservatism.
4. Resurgence (2008–13). The KMT's return to power brought about regressive policy changes as many reforms were rolled back or threatened. Social movements re-emerged partly to defend their previous achievements and partly because of the loss of institutional channels of participation.<sup>22</sup>
5. Finally, the Sunflower Movement of 2014 and its powerful aftermath elevated the power of social movements to the unprecedented level that paved way for the NPP's success. The following analysis will trace the development of Taiwan's movement parties with this periodization.

### The Permeability of Mainstream Parties

Establishing and maintaining an independent party is costly, so social-movement activists do not typically embrace it as a first choice. If they can find political allies among the existing mainstream parties, they tend to collaborate with them. The decision to launch a movement party runs the risk of souring an existing relationship with political sponsors in the mainstream parties, as it signifies a political intent to replace the latter. Therefore, the degree of openness of mainstream parties to movement demands represents a political opportunity. Other things being equal, only when the

22. Ming-sho Ho, "Understanding the Trajectory of Social Movements in Taiwan (1980–2010)," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 39.3 (Fall 2010): 3–22.

permeability of mainstream parties is greatly reduced, insulating them from friendly overtures by social movements, are efforts to form movement parties more likely to take place.<sup>23</sup>

There have been few cases in which the conservative KMT adopted a collaborative stance toward social movements; the DPP has more normally been their political ally. Therefore, the successive endeavors to build a movement party boiled down to the question of how to persuade DPP supporters to change their voting behavior.

The DPP originated in the late 1970s from the opposition movement (Dangwai, “outside the party”), and DPP leaders initially faced a challenge similar to that of East European dissidents in the same period: how to establish a political party out of a movement.<sup>24</sup> At the moment of its birth, the DPP was torn between two tendencies. The absence of a left-wing tradition, the prior existence of local elections, and the middle-class leadership of the DPP predisposed the nascent opposition party to take what Panebianco calls the “electoral-professional” route.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the simultaneous rise of social movements as well as the government’s repression encouraged the DPP to take to the streets. Thus, in its initial years, the DPP maintained a close relationship with social movements while at the same time seeking to construct itself as a “catch-all party” to compete against the arch-rival KMT. In making this effort, over the years the DPP became more mainstream and established, and its permeability to social movements declined, thus inviting the attempt to organize movement parties.

There were three critical junctures that shaped the DPP’s degree of permeability. First, while the young DPP was deeply mired in a tactical debate between parliamentarianism and street protests, its successes in the national elections of 1989 and 1992 laid the foundations for an election-oriented opposition party, whose commitment to social movement causes faded as it became a would-be ruling party. Afterwards, although the DPP retained the residual inclination to mobilize its supporters for protest occasionally, it

23. Drew Halfmann, *Doctors and Demonstrators: How Political Institutions Shape Abortion Law in the United States, Britain, and Canada* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2011).

24. John K. Glenn, “Parties out of Movements: Party Emergence in Postcommunist Eastern Europe,” in *States, Parties and Social Movements*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone, 147–169 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

25. Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, 268 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

could no longer be described as a movement party, particularly when Taiwan's democracy was consolidated in the mid-1990s. Second, the DPP's unexpected capture of national power in 2000 was largely a windfall due to an internecine split in the KMT. Consequently, the DPP had to hastily learn how to govern "responsibly," which left its former movement allies feeling abandoned and betrayed.<sup>26</sup> Lastly, the DPP sustained a decisive defeat in 2008, not only losing the presidency by a wide margin but also seeing the number of its legislators slashed to less than one-quarter of the total seats. In the effort to rebuild support, the DPP sought to make amends for the damaged relationship with civil society organizations and conceded to some of their demands, thus becoming more permeable to social movements.

Viewed individually, each of these three types of political opportunity has a specific effect for movement parties. The changing electoral system provides different access points for movement activists. While heightened movement mobilization exerts a stimulating effect, the decreasing permeability of the DPP pushes them into the electoral arena. However, the reality was a far more complicated combination of these elements. First, the causal effect of each political opportunity is at times curvilinear, rather than linear. Intensified movement activism generally encourages movement parties up to a certain point, and beyond it, overconfidence over the electoral prospect can generate unexpected sources of schism. As movement-oriented candidates become less willing to coordinate their campaign efforts, the likelihood of success is reduced because of excessive intramural competition, as evidenced in the poor electoral performance of Taiwan's two labor-based parties in the late 1980s.

The particular combination of three political opportunities in a specific period brings about "conjunctural causation" because of the unanticipated interaction among them. The idea that causal mechanisms operate according to circumstances challenges the traditional assumption that each independent variable exerts a uniform effect across different situations. For instance, the historically low point of DPP's permeability during its incumbency (2000–07) should have motivated the formation of movement parties, but this favorable condition was effectively neutralized by a lower level of movement activism. The advocates of conjunctural causation are interested in historical

26. Shuge Wei, "Recovery from 'Betrayal': Local Anti-nuclear Movements and Party Politics in Taiwan," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 14.3 (April 2016): 1–21.

comparison of different national cases<sup>27</sup>—an approach that resonates with our attempt to explain the trajectories of Taiwan’s movement parties in different stages, aiming at a holistic understanding of cases and periods rather than disaggregating them into variables.

In short, we avoid the deterministic use of political opportunity theory. Instead, this article aims to understand the changing situational combinations of three political opportunities and how they structured the dynamic of movement parties over more than two decades.

## THE EVOLUTION OF TAIWAN’S MOVEMENT PARTIES

### 1. Popular Upsurge (1987–92): Workers’ Party and Labor Party

One year after the DPP’s founding, it experienced a fissure. Wang Yixiong, a recently elected opposition legislator with sympathy for the plight of workers, began to criticize the DPP for claiming to be a “party for all the people” (*quanmin zhengdang*), which he considered an inappropriate imitation of the KMT’s claim.<sup>28</sup> Wang’s growing distance from the DPP won the endorsement of some left-wing and pro-unification intellectuals, and their collaboration gave rise in November 1987 to the Workers’ Party, Taiwan’s first working-class party.

It was founded during brewing labor unrest as an unprecedented wave of spontaneous strikes erupted in the spring of 1988. But labor insurgency failed to boost the nascent movement party; instead, it deepened the ideological rift between Wang and the intellectuals. Wang advocated an ameliorative approach to improve the workers’ conditions, while the latter insisted on socialism and unification. The escalating conflict culminated in pro-unification members’ walking out to create the Labor Party (*Laodongdang*) in early 1989.

Riding the surge of labor protests, two labor-based parties had emerged within a short period of time. Clearly labor militancy lent confidence to both sides, making them less willing to compromise. They were severely tested in the 1989 legislative election, in which the Workers’ Party nominated eight candidates and the Labor Party, three. Together they received 98,629 votes (1.08%), and none of the candidates was elected.<sup>29</sup> The 1989 election was the

27. Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

28. *Xinxinwen* [New Journalists] 10 (August 1987), 27.

29. Central Election Commission, *Dongyuan kanluan shiqi ziyou diqu zenger lifaweiyuan xuanju shilu* [Record of the Supplementary Legislative Election of the Free Territory during the Period of National Mobilization to Suppress the Rebellion] (Taipei: Central Election Commission, 1990).

last that maintained the functional groups, which were later replaced by PR seats. The bid for the five legislator seats was particularly intense since both parties needed to secure a footing here to legitimize their claim to represent the working class. But three seats went to the KMT and two to the DPP, and the combined votes for the two Workers' Party nominees and the one Labor Party nominee were less than for the last-place elected candidate.<sup>30</sup> Amid the crushing defeat, though, two Workers' Party members were elected as local councilors.

In hindsight, the 1989 election was the only meaningful chance for the two nascent movement parties, and what came after was a steady decline. The 1992 legislative election was the last one the Workers' Party joined, and it became inactive afterwards. The Labor Party maintained electoral activities until 1996, with diminishing votes.

Post-martial law developments worked against these two movement parties. The wave of grass-roots worker militancy swiftly receded and was replaced by a more moderate movement that largely relied on cooperation with the DPP. Taiwan's subsequent labor-movement turn focused more on the legislative arena, in which friendly opposition lawmakers provided critical leverage to secure legal reforms. The DPP's high permeability frustrated the development of the two movement parties by encouraging labor activists to work with the mainstream opposition party.

## 2. Institutionalization (1993–99): Taiwan Green Party

The Taiwan Green Party (TGP) was founded by anti-nuclear activists in January 1996 as a combined consequence of escalating movement mobilization and widening disagreement with the DPP. Taiwan's nuclear politics evolved around the ill-fated Fourth Nuclear Power Plant (FNPP), whose annual budget review in the legislature inevitably aroused confrontation between anti-nuclear and pro-nuclear lawmakers. In 1994, the KMT lawmakers forcibly passed a seven-year budget, effectively removing the controversial project from legislators' supervision. Anti-nuclear activists had to devise a new extraparliamentary strategy to continue their opposition to the FNPP. In the summer of that year, they launched a signature-collecting campaign to recall the pro-nuclear

30. Ming-sho Ho, *Working Class Formation in Taiwan: Fractured Solidarity in State-Owned Enterprises 1945–2012*, 152 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

lawmakers, which turned out to embolden the activists, claiming to “have seen mass participation of such scale for the first time.” The fundraising campaign was much more successful than expected, and they became confident they could “have their own people and money.”<sup>31</sup>

As the anti-nuclear activists took to the streets, the DPP became less enthusiastic in championing the anti-nuclear cause. Their lawmakers did not prioritize opposition to the FNPP, but occasionally used it as a quid pro quo for promoting other political agendas.<sup>32</sup> The DPP leadership appeared more concerned about its public image than about pursuing the commitment, which prompted anti-nuclear activists to organize the TGP.

For the National Assembly election, the TGP nominated 13 activists involved in environmental, community, and cultural issues, reflecting the diversity of contemporary ecological politics. The TGP obtained 3.6% in the districts it chose to contest,<sup>33</sup> and one candidate was successfully elected, but he opted to leave the TGP soon after. In 1998, eight candidates ran in the autonomous city/county council election and the legislative election but failed to reverse the party’s fortunes. Afterwards, the TGP made occasional attempts, only to see its support dwindling.

The TGP’s electoral fortunes reflected the trajectory of Taiwan’s environmentalism and its relation to the DPP. The climax of the anti-nuclear movement arrived in the mid-1990s, and by the time the DPP government backtracked on its promise to scrap the FNPP in 2001, it appeared a spent force. The lowering of the DPP’s permeability should have been a political opportunity, but the TGP was weakened by the decline of anti-nuclear mobilization. It was only after the KMT’s return to power in 2008 that the TGP regained its momentum.

### 3. Incorporation (2000–07): The Low Tide

The DPP’s coming to power in 2000 marked the end of the transition from authoritarianism, and unexpectedly it also brought about the nadir for

31. Interview with Hong Yuzheng, member of the TPG central standing committee, September 2, 1999.

32. Interview with Lu Jiancang, Taipei Branch, Taiwan Environmental Protection Union, June 24, 1999.

33. Unless indicated otherwise, election data are from the website of the Central Election Commission, <<http://db.cec.gov.tw>>, accessed February 28, 2015.

movement parties. The new entrant in this period was the Workers' Legislative Action Committee (Gongren lifa xingdong weiyuanhui, WLAC), a labor-movement organization established in 1992. The WLAC traversed a winding ideological and political path, drifting away from its original roots in the labor movement and spreading into other movement issues.<sup>34</sup> Three WLAC activists launched their electoral efforts in 2002, but in spite of their persistence, it remained the least competitive movement party in terms of vote support.

#### 4. Resurgence (2008–13): The Revival of Movement Parties

The 2005 constitutional amendment altered the electoral rule for the national legislature, changing the rules of the game for movement parties. Although the change of 73 seats of district legislators from SNTV to SMD made it more difficult for movement parties to contest in this area, the introduction of the second party vote meant a realistic chance to enter the fray for the 34 PR seats as long as they could nominate at least 10 district candidates, which prompted the TGP and the WLAC to form an alliance for the 2008 legislative election's PR seats. The TGP again fielded 10 district candidates for the 2012 legislative election, and this time its party votes were 229,566 (1.7%), thus making it the fifth-largest receiver.

As mentioned above, the change in the electoral system affected how movement-oriented candidates accessed the election, but not so much their willingness to join it in the first place. Due to the lack of realistic prospects, Taiwan's movement parties never contested in the PR elections of 1992–2005; they concentrated their efforts in SNTV-district elections. Starting in 2008, the TGP in particular seemed to focus on PR elections only when it could join forces with other movement parties to meet the quorum requirement. The conversion of district legislative elections from SNTV to SMD represented a majoritarian shift that reduced the chance of winning for the candidates of non-mainstream parties. Except for the extremely rare situations of tightly drawn three-way competition or more, the only way a movement party could win in a district legislative election was if the DPP decided not

34. The WLAC activists went by the new name Raging Citizens Act Now (Renmin huoda xingdong lianmeng) in 2007, and after 2011 by People's Democratic Front (Renmin minzhu zhenxian), which was officially registered as a political party. To avoid confusion, this paper uses the term WLAC.

to field its own candidate there. And this was unlikely because there were always DPP aspirants in every district. As will be shown below, it was only after the Sunflower Movement that the DPP decided to make partial concession to the movement parties, which facilitated the victories of three NPP district candidates in 2016.

Ultimately the resuscitation of movement activists' electioneering was propelled by the resurgence of social protests after the KMT returned to power in 2008. The TGP rode on the new wave of environmental protests that had secured some milestone victories, such as the anti-casino movement in 2009 and the cancellation of the Guoguang petrochemical project in 2011. The Fukushima incident in Japan in 2011 also revived Taiwan's anti-nuclear movement and broadened its public acceptance.<sup>35</sup> The Labor Party, whose electoral campaign activities had petered out in the mid-1990s, was also stimulated by the recent labor protests. The global financial tsunami produced a sudden spike in the unemployment rate in Taiwan, particularly in Hsinchu, where high-tech firms were concentrated. A Labor Party activist was elected as local councilor in 2009, and made a successful re-election bid in 2014.

Finally, there was a perceivable pro-movement turn on the part of the DPP after 2008. In a number of policy issues, the DPP actually changed its position to meet the rising curve of social protests. In Tsai's presidential bid in 2012, partly because of the tactical need to distract public attention from the cross-strait issue, which was usually perceived as a DPP weak point, she adopted the campaign slogan "fairness and justice" (*gongping zhengyi*) and promoted a policy platform that responded to the reform demands of the social movements. In spite of the friendlier gesture toward social movements, the DPP's permeability increased by only a small margin. In its 2012 PR list for legislative election, only two participants in the disability movement and feminism were nominated, which prompted criticism from movement activists.

### 5. The Sunflower Effect (2014–16): The High Tide of Movement Parties

On the evening of March 18, 2014, two hundred students stormed the Legislative Yuan in opposition to the KMT's railroading of a controversial free trade pact with China. What was initially planned as a sit-in protest that

35. Simona Grano, "Change and Continuities: Taiwan's Post-2008 Environmental Politics," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 43.3 (Fall 2014): 129–159.

could have been quickly evicted by the police evolved into a 24-day “occupy movement” that precipitated an acute constitutional and political crisis. The Sunflower Movement represented the largest and longest protest event in recent Taiwanese history.<sup>36</sup>

The peaceful and orderly conclusion of the Sunflower Movement gave further impetus to the movement parties. Many movement-party activists played important roles in the occupy movement: the TGP and other environmental groups were among the auxiliary NGOs that took care of logistical issues, and the WLAC activists operated a street forum.<sup>37</sup> In particular, since students and young working adults were the main participants, the younger generation became more congenial to the movement parties. The local election in November served as a critical test of how these movement parties could harness the momentum released by the Sunflower Movement.

In 2014, the TGP reported significant organizational expansion: four regional offices were established, and party membership grew from 300 to 500, with the newcomers mostly from the younger generation. Two TGP members were elected as councilors in Taoyuan City and Hsinchu County, their first electoral success since 1996. In fact, the TGP could have performed better but for the split prior to the election, which gave rise to the new Trees Party (Shu dang), which nominated 10 candidates for the councilor election. All these candidates failed, although one of the party’s members was elected the mayor of Chichi Township, in central Taiwan (population 11,356), while one party departee succeeded in being elected as a councilor in Ilan County.

In addition to reinvigorating the existing movement parties, the Sunflower Movement encouraged the effort to build new ones. Wings of Radical Politics (Jijin ceyi) was a group of young pro-independence activists who attempted to steer the Sunflower Movement onto a more radical course, to no avail. Afterwards, they recruited more members and fielded five candidates, who were all under 30 years old. Although Wings of Radical Politics was not formally registered as a political party, its candidates campaigned with a coordination office and a common platform.<sup>38</sup> These young candidates were not

36. Ming-sho Ho, “Occupy Congress in Taiwan: Political Opportunity, Threat and the Sunflower Movement,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 15.1 (Spring 2005): 69–97.

37. The only exception was the pro-China Labor Party, which openly supported the free trade pact.

38. Although Wings of Radical Politics is more vocally pro-independence, this article still views it as a movement party because it also raises other demands concerning social inequality. The same principle goes for the avowedly pro-unification Labor Party.

TABLE I. Movement Parties in the 2014 Local Councilor Elections

| <i>Party</i>                          | <i>Candidates</i> | <i>Candidates<br/>elected</i> | <i>Total<br/>votes</i> | <i>Total<br/>vote share</i> |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Taiwan Green Party                    | 9                 | 2                             | 54,059                 | 4.8%                        |
| Trees Party                           | 8                 | 0                             | 38,110                 | 2.8%                        |
| Workers' Legislative Action Committee | 14                | 0                             | 15,196                 | 1.0%                        |
| Wings of Radical Politics             | 5                 | 0                             | 31,222                 | 4.7%                        |
| Labor Party                           | 1                 | 1                             | 5,827                  | 8.3%                        |
| Total                                 | 37                | 3                             | 144,414                | 3.5%                        |

SOURCE: Central Election Commission, <<http://db.cec.gov.tw/>>, accessed February 28, 2015.

NOTES: 1. This table only includes the candidates for autonomous city/city/county council elections. 2. Average vote share is district-based, not nationwide.

successful, but their average vote share of 4.7% actually outperformed some existing movement parties.

Table I clearly demonstrates that the Sunflower Movement inspired Taiwan's movement-party activities. The year 2014 witnessed the greatest number of movement-party nominees (37) and elected candidates (3) in a single election, even if we count local councilor elections only. In terms of total votes (144,414) and nationwide vote share (3.5%), this election surpassed the previous record of the 1996 election for national assembly representatives (118,282 votes and 1.1%).

Prior to the eruption of the Sunflower Movement in 2014, a group of intellectuals and movement activists began to organize a "third force" to challenge the monopoly of pan-blue and pan-green parties. On March 3, 2014, the Taiwan Citizen Union (Gongmin zuhe, TCU) was established, and its founding statement called for "idealistic participation by citizens" in the 2016 legislative election. Two weeks later, the unexpected outbreak of the congress occupy movement disrupted and complicated this plan.

The powerful reverberations of the Sunflower Movement disrupted the TCU project. Since the new movement party set its eyes on the 2016 legislative election, it was not directly involved in the local election of 2014, except in launching a crowdfunding campaign to finance a free busing service for students to return to their hometowns to cast their ballots. The better-than-expected result generated a fissure among the TCU activists. In the spring of 2015, the TCU split into two new movement parties, the NPP

and the Social Democratic Party (Shehui minzhu dang, SDP). The former had the advantage of endorsement by Sunflower Movement leaders who had become national celebrities, and the latter secured the TGP's promise of a joint campaign for the national list of PR seats. At the same time, despite their failure two years earlier, the Trees Party and the WLAC also made comebacks in 2016.

In a sense, the NPP/SDP split originated in the ambiguous legacy of the Sunflower Movement, which drew strength from a number of heterogeneous sources, including rising Taiwanese identity, concern over proper procedure, skepticism over free trade, and growing income inequality. Once the legislature occupation ended, there remained few reasons for these tendencies to collaborate under the same roof. On the whole, the NPP appeared more independence-leaning, while the SDP prioritized social reforms and wealth redistribution.<sup>39</sup> Besides, the tactical question of whether to negotiate with the DPP became a bone of contention. Since the election of 73 district legislator seats proceeded in the first-past-the-post manner, the opposition camp risked disastrous internecine warfare in the absence of prior coordination.

While both new parties chose to target the KMT-dominant electoral districts, the NPP made explicit its willingness to coordinate with the DPP on fielding only one candidate in each district, whereas the SDP insisted on its independence by rejecting any party-to-party negotiation. In other words, the NPP positioned itself as a DPP ally by openly endorsing Tsai Ing-wen's bid for the presidency and welcoming the support of DPP politicians. In contrast, the SDP drew its strength from Taiwan's movement NGOs and academic intellectuals by adopting a more or less neutral stance concerning the presidential election. In the end, the SDP opted to team up with the TGP to form a joined TGP-SDP ticket to join the fray for PR seats, while both parties worked their district election separately.

The electoral result seems to vindicate the NPP's strategic choice of a pro-DPP stance in that its three district nominees succeeded in ousting the KMT veteran incumbents. All their victories were made possible because the DPP not only refrained from fielding its own candidates but also encouraged its

39. Nevertheless, before the election, the NPP chair, Huang Kuo-chang, characterized the party as "left-leaning" by emphasizing its commitment to reform taxation, income, and pensions. As Huang saw it, the NPP did not differ much from the SDP or the TGP in terms of ideas; the main disagreement was whether to prioritize the KMT's defeat as the first goal.

TABLE 2. Movement Parties in the 2016 Legislative Election

| <i>Parties</i>                        | <i>District candidates</i> | <i>District candidates elected</i> | <i>Average district votes</i> | <i>Total district vote share</i> | <i>Party vote share</i> | <i>Proportional representation candidates elected</i> |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| New Power Party                       | 12                         | 3                                  | 29,270                        | 16.9%                            | 6.1%                    | 2   |
| Social Democratic Party               | 6                          | 0                                  | 24,231                        | 14.1%                            | 2.5%                    | 0   |
| Taiwan Green Party                    | 5                          | 0                                  | 11,655                        | 6.1%                             |                         |   |
| Trees Party                           | 11                         | 0                                  | 2,748                         | 2.9%                             | 0.6%                    | 0   |
| Workers' Legislative Action Committee | 2                          | 0                                  | 3,702                         | 2.2%                             | —                       | —   |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>36</b>                  | <b>3</b>                           | <b>14,321</b>                 | <b>8.4%</b>                      | <b>9.2%</b>             | <b>2</b>  |

SOURCE: Adapted from data from Central Election Commission, <<http://db.cec.gov.tw/>>, accessed March 10, 2016.

NOTES: 1. The SDP and TGP managed their district campaign separately, but formed a joint ticket for the PR seats. 2. Wings of Radical Politics decided to join the proportional-representation list of the Taiwan Solidarity Union by not fielding its own district candidates. 3. WLAC did not nominate the 10 district candidates needed to qualify as a contender for the PR seats.

supporters to vote for the NPP candidates. The NPP also struck a delicate balance between the need to mobilize DPP votes for its district candidates and the imperative to compete with the DPP for the PR seats in the second vote. With its two PR seats (6.1% in party vote), the NPP emerged as the third-largest party in Taiwan.

On the other hand, the TGP-SDP ticket (2.5%) failed to surpass the 5% threshold, which came as an unexpected disappointment to its core members. On the eve of the election, they were cautiously positive that the TGP-SDP would surpass the 5% threshold and establish their presence in the national legislature. The failure to reach even 3.5%, which would have entitled them to government subsidy, made the defeat even more bitter. Given that the TGP secured 1.7% in the 2012 election on its own, a growth of merely 0.8% through the influx of Sunflower activists and the partnership with the SDP was really a poor performance.

Table 2 summarizes the electoral results in 2016, which again marked a new zenith of movement-party activities. As many as 36 movement-oriented candidates competed in the election for 73 district legislator seats. While the TGP's 1.7% in party vote represented the share of pro-movement voters in the previous election, the combined share (9.2%) of NPP, TGP-SDP, and

the Trees Party was clearly huge progress, fittingly capturing the post-Sunflower zeitgeist in Taiwan. Granted that the electoral result was far more complicated than simple arithmetic, it remained a plausible guess that movement-party candidates would have ended up with more than five seats had the original TCU project remained intact.

Still, why the NPP outperformed the SDP requires an explanation. Aside from its pragmatic positioning as an ally of the DPP, which was widely expected to win the presidency, the NPP also possessed tactical advantages in human and financial resources. First, all three successful NPP district candidates had long since become charismatic and arguably good-looking celebrities, particularly popular among young voters, before deciding to join the election, while most of the SDP and TGP candidates struggled to attract media attention. Moreover, my interview sources indicated that the NPP appeared financially stronger. All three successful NPP candidates ran on budgets of more than NT\$ 10 million (US\$ 300,000), whereas the top spenders in the SDP and the TGP used only NT\$ 5 million (US\$ 156,250) and NT\$ 2 million (US\$ 62,500), respectively. In other words, while movement commitment remains the defining feature of movement parties, it also takes pragmatism and material resources to become a viable player.

Finally, seeing the surge of movement parties in 2014 (and the strong competition from the NPP and the SDP, the DPP deliberately increased its permeability in the 2016 PR list, which amounted to an impressive snapshot of Taiwan's contemporary social movements: leaders in food safety, environmentalism, human rights, feminism, rural preservation, disability, labor, and social enterprises were nominated. Altogether, the DPP placed eight activists, including two TGP members, in front-ranking positions that were estimated as safe. Here higher permeability was employed as a campaign tactic to prevent pro-reform voters' defection to movement parties. In the final week before the election, the DPP launched a vigorous campaign to urge its supporters to concentrate their party vote to fend off the surging NPP. Consequently, the DPP was able to secure 18 out of 34 PR seats, whereas the NPP ended up with fewer PR seats than expected.<sup>40</sup>

40. One NPP co-president estimated that the DPP's last-minute offensive had cost his party two seats. Interview with Lin Shi-yu, NPP co-president, April 12, 2016.

## DISCUSSION

Table 3 recapitulates the trajectories of Taiwan's movement parties up to 2016. There is a V-shaped pattern in Taiwan's movement-party activities, with the DPP's tenure in power as the long doldrums for movement activists' electioneering. The level of movement mobilization and the DPP's permeability evolved largely in the same direction from 1987 to 2016, reflecting Taiwan's transition from authoritarianism and the consolidation of a vibrant multi-party democracy. Theoretically, the two political directions exert opposite influences on movement parties, since the gradual closing of the DPP's avenues to movement activists should have stimulated movement-party efforts. The weakened social movements were not able to make use of favorable political change because the lack of publicly known leaders, the limited number of movement participants, and the media's inattention severely constrained their electoral capacity.

The DPP's changing relationship with social movements is also a noteworthy feature. The DPP's behavior was actually quite similar to the European social democratic parties, which in opposition tend to facilitate social movements, while they often "have to make compromises with regard to their electoral promises" if they are in the government.<sup>41</sup> The fact that there exists a European pattern of left-and-right politics in contemporary Taiwan is often obscured because most of the attention is on the independence-versus-unification conflict.

There are several remarkable features in the evolution of Taiwan's movement parties over more than two decades. First, there is a clear transition from "old social movements" to "new social movements" as the class-based movement parties gave way to those whose defining concerns ranged across environmental protection, gender equality, and alternative cultures, as exemplified by the TGP's 1996 list of candidates. More recently, the "citizens' movement" surged and was empowered by the Sunflower Movement, which seemed to make the movement categories obsolete because many activists were simultaneously engaged in a number of issues.

Second, Taiwan's movement parties offered a more accessible avenue for young people to enter the political arena. In 1993–2007, movement-party

41. Hanspeter Kriesi, "The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements: Its Impact on Their Mobilization," in *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspective on States and Social Movements*, ed. J. Craig Jenkin and Bert Klandermans, 182 (London: UCL Press, 1995).

TABLE 3. A Political Opportunity Analysis of Taiwan's Movement Parties (1987–2016)

|   | 1987–92                       | 1993–99              | 2000–07       | 2008–13                      | 2014  | 2016                                     |
|---|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|------------------------------|---|--|
| Accessed electoral system   | SNTV                          | SNTV                 | SNTV + (SMD)  | SNTV + PR + (SMD)            | SNTV + (SMD)  | SMD + PR                                 |
| Level of movement mobilization  | High                          | Medium               | Low           | High                         | High  | High                                     |
| The DPP's permeability  | High                          | Medium               | Low           | Medium                       | Medium  | High                                     |
| Active movement parties   | Workers' Party<br>Labor Party | TGP<br>(Labor Party) | WLAC<br>(TGP) | TGP<br>WLAC<br>(Labor Party) | TGP<br>Tress Party<br>WLAC<br>Wings of Radical<br>Politics<br>(Labor Party) | NPP<br>SDP<br>TGP<br>Tress Party<br>WLAC |
| Candidates elected / nominated<br>(district only)                                     | 2/27                          | 1/27                 | 0/8           | 1/36                         | 3/39  | 3/36                                     |
| Average age of movement party<br>candidates / all candidates<br>(district only)       | 41/NA                         | 38/45                | 43/47         | 41/50                        | 40/52   | 38/50                                    |
| Female percentage of movement<br>party candidates / all candidates<br>(district only) | 14.8/NA                       | 48.1/16.3            | 25/20.3       | 44.4/25.8                    | 38.5/27.8   | 44.4/25.2                                |

SOURCE: Pre-1994 election data are based on the published records of the election commissions of the central government, Taiwan Province government, and Kaohsiung City government. The rest are from Central Election Commission, <http://db.ccc.gov.tw/>, accessed March 10, 2016.

NOTES: 1. This table includes the elections for representatives (legislators, national assembly representatives, autonomous city/city/country councilors) and local executives (autonomous/city/country mayors), but leaves out the elections below the level of city/country. 2. Parentheses indicate the less commonly used electoral system or the less active movement parties. 3. Abbreviations: SNTV, single nontransferable voting in multimeber districts. SMD, single-member districts. PR, proportional representation. TGP, Taiwan Green Party. WLAC, Workers' Legislative Action Committee. NPP, New Power Party. SDP, Social Democratic Party. NA, not available.

candidates were younger than their mainstream competitors by 5–9 years. In the two elections after the Sunflower Movement, the gap further widened to 12 years, indicating an unprecedented wave of interest by the younger generation in politics (Table 3). In terms of gender, except for the Workers' Party and Labor Party, movement parties obviously offered a broader channel for women to pursue their political careers. The two class-based parties conformed to the traditional pattern of labor movement dominated by male union leadership. With the paradigmatic turn to “new social movements” in the mid-1990s, subsequent movement parties appeared more gender-friendly. Particularly in the 2016 election, a number of TGP and SDP candidates were openly homosexual, and that they eloquently defended their sexual orientation in front of the electorate further advanced gender equality in Taiwan's politics.

## CONCLUSION

Movement parties are basically an ambitious attempt to convert movement activism into political power. Once in the electoral game, movement activists have to play the role of slick candidates whose number-one objective is to be elected. The very existence of movement parties testifies to the abiding attraction of the democratic principle, which promises to empower every citizen equally. Movement parties are hopelessly idealistic because they sincerely believe that the equalitarian head-counting rule will eventually help marginalized groups rather than merely benefiting the privileged minority. Focusing on the electoral activities of movement parties helps us look at the interaction of social protests and elections—a critical yet neglected issue in political sociology. When students of social movements look for the consequences of social protest, they should not unduly restrict their attention to policy impacts or changes in culture and everyday life. Established and durable movement parties, like the European Greens, also count as a movement legacy.

The Taiwan context sensitizes us to the ever-changing relationship between the main opposition party and social movements. After all, the DPP evolved from an opposition movement that sought to challenge the KMT both in elections and in social protests. Its progress into a mainstream party and then a ruling party reduced the permeability to movement activists, who attempted to have their own political representatives from time to time. This historical survey reveals that movement parties usually emerged along with

rising waves of social protest. The advent of the labor movement in the late 1980s, the extraparliamentary turn of the anti-nuclear movement in the mid-1990s, and the emergence of the “citizens’ movement” after 2008 as well as its culmination after the 2014 Sunflower Movement constituted three rising tides of movement-party activities in Taiwan. Now with the NPP’s conquest of the legislative seats, there emerged a possibility that it might evolve into a more or less permanent feature in the national polity.

Rising social protests provided the momentum for movement parties; however, it is less noticed that they also paved the way for schisms. The fatal split of the Workers’ Party in 1988, the dissolution of the TGP–WLAC alliance after 2008, and the TCU’s fission into two new parties in 2015 provide evidence that internal ideological differences were less likely to be accommodated when party activists sensed a greater chance of success. The seduction of sectarianism should be not a surprise since movement parties were more likely to be led by idealistic intellectuals and driven by movement causes that allowed little room for compromise.

Finally, movement parties remained a challenging project. They tended to be underfinanced and understaffed, which severely affected the viability of their electioneering. Movement parties encountered difficulties in maintaining discipline over their candidates and elected politicians since they had little leverage to sanction violators. Social movements usually developed in a rise-and-fall pattern, offering only a very brief window of opportunity for movement parties. Failures in the incipient period were usually very costly, if not deadly. The Workers’ Party never recovered from its decisive defeat in 1992. It took more than two decades for the Labor Party to have an elected representative after its failure in 1989. After its setback in 1996, the TGP limped on until the Fukushima incident rekindled the anti-nuclear movement in 2011. After the 2016 election, it remains to be observed whether (1) the victorious NPP can secure a more solid footing in Taiwan’s political landscape, (2) the SDP can survive the initial failure, which has always been devastating for first-timers, and (3) the veteran TGP manages to maintain the momentum it regained in 2008.

In spite of their high failure rate and the daunting difficulties, movement parties deserve a close look because they exemplify the effort to extend the boundaries of contemporary electoral democracy—a crucial experiment on whether the principle of universal suffrage and fair competition can really empower the underprivileged. The consequences of these attempts should be of interest, both in Taiwan and elsewhere.