

Public Opinion, Elite Alliance, and Movement Success in Taiwan's Sunflower Movement

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Abstract: The 2014 Sunflower Movement succeeded in blocking Taiwan's Congress from ratifying the Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement (CSSTA) with China, a bill that proposed to liberalize trade with China. Since most of the participants in this movement were students and NGO members, they had limited economic and political resources to influence policy change, which makes their success in stopping a trade deal remarkable. Many attribute this important success to an elite alliance with politicians inside the government, fueled by a personal rivalry between political elites. However, in this paper I argue that changing public opinion is another important force behind the creation of the alliance. With original data from interviews with political elites, their staff members, and activists in Taiwan and other secondary information, I find public opinion to be another major reason for the political alliance. These findings suggest that both public opinion and elite rivalry are crucial factors for explaining why elites form an alliance with activists. This case illustrates that in some circumstances; public opinion could compliment the importance of elite rivalry in influencing political elite decision-making, and could represent a key mechanism of democratic policymaking.

Introduction

On the evening of March 18, 2014, Taiwanese university students and NGO workers stormed the assembly hall of Taiwan's Legislature. Their occupation of Taiwan's capitol initiated a 24-day social movement — the Sunflower Movement. The group's action was a desperate attempt to block the opaque review and ratification process of the Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement (CSSTA) with China. When the movement ended, it successfully postponed the verification process of the trade pact indefinitely.

Observers do not dispute the social movement's influence in this case (Rowen 2015). What is disputed is the mechanism, the causal pathway, by which the social movement exerted its effect. *How* did the movement succeed in influencing public policymakers? Since most participants were students and NGO members, they had limited financial and political resources to influence policy change. Therefore, many believe the movement achieved its success in blocking the ratification through the assistance of allies external to the movement. In fact, previous work has offered some evidence supporting the argument that an alliance with political elites often helps social movements achieve policy goals (Giugni and Passy 1998).

The dispute centers on what drives these important alliances. In the case of the Sunflower Movement, the emerging consensus in the literature, led most prominently by Ming-Sho Ho, argues that movement activists utilized a rivalry between top leaders of the then-incumbent party — the Kuomintang (KMT) to leverage influence. He argues: "In fact, it was largely due to the

personal rivalry between Ma Ying-jeou (Taiwan's ex-President) and Wang Jin-pyng (ex-President of Taiwan's Congress) that protesters were able to take hold of the plenary conference chamber on March 18 and also conclude their protest with a claim of success on April 10" (Ho 2015, 92).

While the elite-rivalry argument is widely shared among researchers and journalists, it underestimates the influence of public opinion in the movement's success. Since the movement received substantial public support from the beginning, the voice of the public can also force decisionmakers to comply with the public's policy preferences. As of now, the role of public opinion has not been given enough weight in prior research on the Sunflower Movement. Although Ho included poll results of public support and disapproval of the movement, he did not focus on the mechanisms with which public opinion could influence policymakers. Thus, there is still a possibility that the elite alliance with activists that he identifies as important for the movement's success could also be contributed by changes in public opinion. I argue that more careful specification of this mechanism better shows the influence of public opinion. This paper reexamines this case with an eye to offering a more specific account of how social movements can work through public opinion to affect public policy.

I present original data from interviews conducted in Taiwan regarding critical decisions made by political leaders, especially the ex-President of Taiwan's Legislature, Wang Jin-pyng, and secondary information from local newspapers and reports. I conclude that public opinion, in addition to elite rivalry, was a major reason for the success of the Sunflower Movement. Public opinion influences both critical decisions Wang made throughout the movement: whether to eject activists with police force and announce the decision to postpone the verification process. Elite

disunity, while a crucial factor, cannot fully explain Wang's decisions interpreted as aligning with activists. As my interviewees explained, elite rivalry Wang did not motivate Wang to align with the with the movement as such entails too much political risk — it would position him against all his peers in his party, not just the ex-president (Anonymous 2016). Wang make critical decisions by taking account into public opinion, a method to mitigate the political risks of his decisions. In short, both public opinion and elite rivalry are critical factors for Wang's decision-making throughout the movement.

This study contributes to our understanding of the conditions under which social movements can make an impact on policy in a democracy. It shows that the voices of the masses can sometimes be just as important as factors such as elite rivalry in elite decision-making. Also, public opinion can help activists create a political opportunity that elites could seize upon to deliver policy change. As a result, this paper calls into question social movement models that focus mostly on political or intra-legislative factors, to the exclusion of public opinion, as their main variable of interest in explaining movement outcomes. As we have demonstrated, without evaluating the influence of public opinion, those storyline behind those studies may have been oversimplified.

Mediators of Social Movement Success

Although several factors, such as mobilizing structures and framing of a movement, have been found to influence a movement's outcomes (Gamson 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Snow et al. 1986; McAdam et al. 1996), there has been a growing interest in understanding how

alliance with political elites helps social movements achieve their goals. Scholars working on this strand of research take the assumption that movements alone cannot realize their political objectives. Instead, their policy successes are mediated by factors external to the movement itself, such as internal division among political leaders or public opinion. These factors may form the basis for an alliance between elites and social movements. When movements have institutional actors on their side, they are often more likely to achieve their policy goals (Amenta et al. 1992).

There is an ongoing debate, however, as to which external factors carry the most significance for the emergence of elite alliances so critical to movement influence: what makes these elites receptive to social movement demands? Why do they sometimes choose to ally with movements, and sometimes reject those efforts? Some argue that the key is elite rivalry, grounding their thinking in theorizing about political opportunity structures, that is, the circumstances under which social activists can utilize opportunities arising from formal political institutions to achieve their policy goal (Kriesi et al. 1995; Goodwin et al. 1999; Meyer and Minkoff 2004). However useful thinking about rivalry is, the term “political opportunity” has received criticism, as many claim that it has become an overly broad term used to cover many concepts while undermining its explanatory power (Amenta and Halfmann 2011; Ho 2015). Political opportunities could imply a wide range of factors, including but going beyond rivalries, for example.

To restore the conceptual and analytical clarity of the insight that political context mediates the relationships between social movements and outcomes (Amenta 2015), some advocate for a new term, “political mediation.” Political mediation models argue that for a

movement to be successful, it requires favorable political conditions such as supportive allies within the institutions (Amenta, Carruthers, and Zylan 1992). This theoretical framework incorporates numerous long-term and some short-term political opportunity variables.

For social movements with briefer lifespans, short-term variables have more influence on the outcome than long-term variables that rarely change — such as levels of democratization and regime types. Elite rivalry, some have argued, is one important short-term variable for movement success (Kriesi et al. 1995; Ho 2015). When elites are fractured and have second thoughts about current political institutions, instabilities arise (Field et al. 1976). Movements may be more likely to succeed, in this view, when there exists disagreement within an incumbent political party, resulting in political alliance with the movement (Burton 1977; Amenta et al. 1992; Amenta et al. 1995; Amenta et al. 2005; Ho 2015). Elite disunity can be the result of a personal rivalry between top leaders, leading them to believe that helping a movement succeed could weaken their opponent's power.

Ho takes this approach in a recent study, developing a model to explain the Sunflower Movement's political victory. In addition to the other factors contributing to movement success (such as support from the opposition party, and the urgency activists felt about the bill passing), He argues that the internal split within the incumbent party is the critical reason for social movement success: "In fact, it was largely due to the personal rivalry between Ma Ying-jeou and Wang Jin-pyng that protesters were able to take hold of the plenary conference chamber on March 18 and also conclude their protest with a claim of success on April 10" (92). In other words, Ho asserts that an elite rivalry led Wang to become an important ally to the movement and helped it achieve success.

Ho's explanations, however, do not give enough credit to the role that public opinion played in the movement. Since the movement carried broad public support from the beginning, the alliance between elites and the movements could also be sparked by the context of supportive public opinion. Ho does examine public opinion poll results during the movement to illustrate the broader context of popular support for the occupation, but he does not explore the effect of those polls on elite decision-making. Without ruling out the possibility that the elite alliance was also due to public opinion, Ho may have overemphasized the importance of elite rivalry in motivating political elites to form an alliance with social movements.

Public opinion is often sufficient to motivate politicians to align with social movements. Leaders pay attention to public opinion to ensure their political survival. Studies contradict the conventional wisdom that elites could manipulate public opinion; instead, research shows that institutions set up to manipulate public opinion often have the inadvertent effect of leading leaders to comply with public opinion (Jacobs 1992). Public policy scholars have repeatedly found that public opinion seems to compel policymakers to conform to public preferences across a wide spectrum of issues—foreign policy, military spending, immigration policy, women's equality, and support for war (Knecht 2010; Baum and Potter 2015; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifer 2005; Burstein 2003; Costain and Majstorovic 1994; Page and Shapiro 1983; Hartley and Russett 1992; Burstein and Freudenburg 1978).

Burstein, an expert on how public opinion influences social movements, argues that the occurrence of a social movement can move public opinion, which then leads to a change in legislation (Burstein 1979). Critics of this approach, however, argue that when political actors are present, public opinion will lose its influence. However, studies show political actors are only

influential when agreeing with the public. When they disagree, the public often has a larger influence on policy (Burstein 2003).

Under what circumstance is public opinion most influential on policy? Research shows the *salience* of an issue, and not just the substance of public opinion towards that issue, determines the attention it receives and its outcome. A salient issue is more likely to attract the public's limited attention. After an issue receives public attention, citizens need to form a collective opinion for public opinion to be effective. When the public expresses a clear position on a salient issue, it often propels leaders to adhere to what the public wants (Burstein 2003).

Our discussions of elite rivalry and public opinion leave us with two views of the formation of political alliances with social movements. Ho argues that an internal split, resulting from a personal rivalry between top leaders, led politicians to side with the movement, while I argue that the voice of the people can also led to the alliance. The contextualized hypotheses with the Sunflower Movement are as follow:

Elite rivalry: if an elite disunity exists within the Kuomintang party (KMT), it would motivate some leaders within the party to take a favorable position to the movement.

Public opinion: if the Taiwanese public considers the protest against the CSTSA and the occupation of the legislative hall to be a salient issue, with the majority of the population supporting the activists, then politicians will respond in kind with public policy preferences supporting the movement.

Research Design

Methods

Testing the above hypotheses requires information about public opinion, elite rivalry within the incumbent party and the decisions political leaders made throughout the movement. The short duration of the movement enables an in-depth tracing of all major events and decisions made by political leaders. Process-tracing has been a commonly-used method in qualitative research. A major advantage of using such a method is that it allows us to separate events as they occur to increase our claims on causality (Collier 2011).

I collect sources of evidence from published accounts, mostly from local newspapers and reports of the movement. However, secondary information is insufficient for understanding the chains of causality for some critical decisions politicians made during the movement, especially the announcement by the ex-President of the Legislature, Wang Jin-pyng, to postpone the ratification of the bill. Such a decision was interpreted as directly related to the success of the movement. However, secondary resources appear to be limited in aiding our understanding of the decision-making process of such an action.

To gain a better understanding of this critical event, I conducted in-depth interviews with political elites and their staff members in Taiwan. Between May and June 2016, I traveled to Taiwan to undertake six interviews with legislators from major political parties, such as the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), a new rising party, the New Power Party, and their staff members. All my interviewees were to some extent — some directly

while others in only an ancillary manner — involved in the development of the movement. Their knowledge of the norms, rules and networks within the legislature makes them appropriate interlocutors to weigh in on the decision-making of Wang during the movement. Semi-structured interviews were tailored to reconstruct the process of Wang's tide-turning decisions, and the questions were designed to assess the relative importance of elite rivalry or public opinion in motivating Wang to make such a decision. To corroborate my understandings of the events during the movement, I interviewed another 10 activists involved in the movement.

Issue Salience

Issue salience is a key criterion for the public opinion hypothesis. For measuring issue salience, I followed Epstein and Segal's method of focusing on the coverage given to an issue by the media. Epstein and Segal use the front page of *The New York Times* to study Supreme Court justices and consider their method applicable to other topics (Epstein and Segal 2000). To gauge the movement's salience, I used the frequency with which the movement appeared on the front page of major newspapers in Taiwan. Since local newspapers often have their own ideological biases, I ameliorated potential bias reporting by including major newspapers for all ideological predispositions, including the *Taipei Times*, the *Liberty Times*, *Apple Daily*, the *China Times*, and the *United Daily News*. If the movement appeared on the front-page for a long period in all newspapers, we have evidence of the salience of the movement.

Public Support for Occupation of the Legislature

To collect information about public support for the movement, I looked at the percentage of approval and disapproval for the activist's occupation of the legislature. Since systematic and

continuous polls by the Taiwanese government or academic institutions do not exist, I relied on various sources as our best estimates of public opinion during the movement. I collected public opinion polls from major TV stations such as Television Broadcasts Satellite (TVBS), government agencies, and research institutions in Taiwan.

In addition to the lack of continuous polls, we trust polls by newspapers agencies for several reasons. Firstly, many newspapers and TV stations I drew data from in Taiwan have a public opinion poll center to conduct polls regularly. They release their survey methodology along with their polls to increase the reliability of their results. I also reduced possible partisan bias by pulling together polls from different TV stations and newspapers. If there were more than one poll available at a time during the movement, I used their averaged value.

Political Allies

I focused only on the major political players in the KMT. Although the major opposition party, DPP, from the beginning of the movement, was sympathetic to the goals of the activists, their support was mostly logistic. Though the DPP legislators had been blocking the ratification in numerous ways, alone they could not garner enough votes to pass legislation countering ratification. On the other hand, the then incumbent party, the KMT, held over half of the seats within their legislature, and the chair of the legislature. Therefore, KMT leaders had comparatively greater direct influence over the movement's outcome.

Moreover, unlike the DPP, the default position of the KMT was not supportive of the movement. As a result, observing key politicians in the KMT to see if they shifted their stance during the movement is critical, as doing so assisted the activists in stalling the ratification. I

define powerful allies as politicians who held a leadership position in the legislative or executive arena during the moment in question, such as the President, Vice President, the President and Vice President of the Legislature, the leader of the Executive Yuan, and the Party Whip. I traced these key leaders' stances during the movement using newspapers and public statements.

Elite Disunity

To capture arguments about elite disunity, I focused on the fragmented leadership inside the KMT. Specifically, I analyzed the personal rivalry between Taiwan's ex-president and the ex-president of the legislature to see what influence that could have on the movement's outcome. I consulted major newspapers, published statements, and other scholarly works for evidence of such rivalry. In addition to using secondary sources, my interviews with politicians offer another way to assess the influence of elite rivalry on political elites' decision-making.

Elite Alliance with Social Movements

The most critical elite alliance between the movement and political elites, especially Wang Jing-ping, came at the later stage of the movement. On April 7th, Wang delivered a speech in which he promised that he would not hold any more inter-party meetings on the trade agreement until a legal mechanism for conducting reviews of legislation concerning cross-strait relations — a critical element of the movement's requests — was set in place to monitor the process (Hsiao and Lok-sin 2014).

Given both parties' polemic views on the legislation, a legal mechanism that both parties could agree on would take a long time to form. As a result, Wang's statement was interpreted as

assisting the activists in achieving their goals successfully. Not surprisingly, the movement ended two days later, as activists judged they had achieved their goals. Wang had offered the bureaucratic support for the movement to succeed. His decision shocked many in his own party, including the President. The KMT Deputy Secretary commented on this situation bluntly — the party felt “betrayed and sold out” by Wang (Hsiao 2014).

Why did Wang make such a decision? The conventional wisdom, according to Ho, is an existing elite rivalry (Ho 2015). The rivalry between him and the former president went back to 2005, developed through a contest for the leadership of the party. In 2013, President Ma accused Wang of influence peddling in public, and in an internal party meeting suggested the nullification of Wang’s membership while he was overseas in Malaysia (Wan 2013). Wang attempted legal steps to maintain his positions as the President of the Congress. The personal rivalry between them led some to believe that Wang used his assistance to the movement to sabotage Ma’s political power.

Focusing solely on elite rivalry will lead us to overlook the role of public opinion, throughout the movement. Support for the movement showed several characteristics that could propel elites to comply with the preferences of the public. The movement was the most salient issue for Taiwanese citizens during the 24 days of protest. It appeared on the front page *every day* for every major newspaper across diverse ideological bents: *Apple Daily*, *The Liberty Times*, *The Taipei Times*, *The China Times*, and *United Daily News*.

With respect to the trends of public opinion during the movement, Figure I report the percentage of approval and disapproval for the occupation of Taiwan’s Congress on twelve points throughout the protest period from March to April 2014. The graph demonstrates the high

support the movement received, lasting until the end of March. Public support dropped after the end of March as a nationwide rally on March 30 did not result in compromise from the government. How did support for the movement influence elite-decision-making?

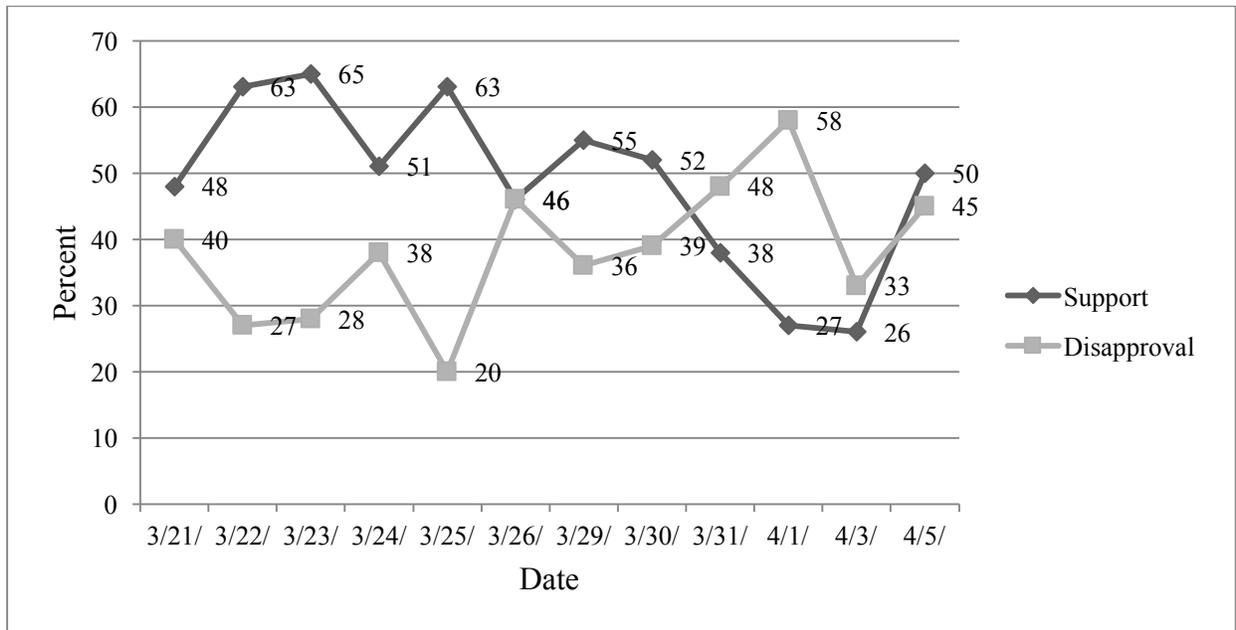


Figure I: Public Support for Occupation of Taiwan’s Legislature in 2014

Source: TVBS, Next TV, Business Today, TISR, China Times, Taiwan Brain Trust, Apple Daily, National Development Council.

How Public Opinion Shapes Movement Outcome

From May-June, I conducted interviews with political elites and their staff members directly or indirectly involved in the movement. All my interviewees considered public opinion a crucial factor influencing Wang’s decision-making. They claim that Wang was mindful of the trend of public support for the occupation throughout the movement and factored it into his political calculus. Wang deferred requests from the public to deal with the movement amidst

high public support at the beginning of the protest; reflecting on his reticence, the interviewee noted:

“...in the first 48 hours, Wang made no comments with respect to his positions to the movement. Why? Because he was observing the tide of the masses to determine his responses to the movement. As it became clear that the movement had high public support, Wang started to consider what decisions should be taken to respond to the movement in a way that could fit with his political interests.” (Anonymous May 2016)

Specifically, public opinion forced Wang to make decisions during two critical junctures in the life of the movement: the decision not to have activists ejected by police and the announcement of his intention to discontinue the verification. Both decisions were not the default decisions Wang would make if he did not consider public opinion to follow the suggestions of his peers in his anti-protest party. The clear trends in public opinion helped him make decisions to secure his political interests.

First Critical Decision: Not to Eject Activists with Police Force

During the first several days the movement, Wang faced a critical decision as to whether he should use police to eject activists after several previous attempts failed. According to my interviewees, Wang initially considered the continuation of police removal, but at the time he was also paying close attention to public opinion. As he learned of the high support the movement received, Wang changed his stance and announced that he “would not consider having them (activists) removed by force” (Shih, Su and Chung 2014). His decision ran counter to the expectations of many within his party, as they had expected him to support the party’s

decision to eject activists (Shih 2014). Wang knew that his decision may have caused dissatisfaction from peers in his party, but he also realized that not following the public might entail even higher political risk — the approval rate for their party, and especially for the president had decreased to an all-time low of 12.3% (TISR 2014). Thus, Wang chose to side with the public. This decision was critical, as it allowed activists to consolidate their power and escalate the movement. Without high public support, Wang would have ordered the continuing removal of activists.

Second Critical Decision: Announcement not to Continue to the Verification Process

Some may suggest that if high support pushed Wang to align with the movement, then the fact that support for the occupation dropped in early April should have prevented Wang from making his alignment announcement. The criticism is misplaced because, at the later stage of the movement, support for the occupation was not the majority public opinion anymore, dropping significantly, to a low of 26% (see Figure 1), mainly because the March 30 rally did not result in any significant compromise from the administration. After the rally, more than half of respondents thought the activists should leave the legislature, as it had been stalled for two weeks (TVBS 2014). Additionally, many started to show impatience with the lack of action by Wang in dealing with the movement. As my interviewed noted, “Wang understood the mass had turned from supporting to disapproving the movement and the need for him to bring an end to the movement.”

As this point, Wang had been searching for a solution that would satisfy public opinion and serve his political interests. However, his options were limited. After the first decision not to eject the activists, he failed in six attempts to reach a compromise between major political parties

(Hsiao and Lok-Sin 2014). Removal of activists with police or military force was another possibility. However, doing so would mean backing away from his promise, and only 39% of the public supported him doing so (TVBS 2014). He also learned from an incident earlier in the movement when police forces cracked down on a group of protestors attempting to occupy another government agency, resulting in 110 injured protestors. The response from the government incited much public uproar and added to the momentum of the movement (Shih 2014). Wang was careful not to make the same mistake.

In addition to the non-feasible options, there were also no signs that the movement would dissipate itself. According to my interviews with movement leaders and several activists, though experiencing signs of fatigue from protesting, they had no plan to retreat (Anonymous May 2016). The unyielding attitude of the former administration had hardened many in the movement to continue protesting. Wang could not count on the protestors to end the movement.

The non-feasible options and the growing impatience of the public constituted the political context for Wang to announce his groundbreaking decision to postpone the verification until a monitoring legal mechanism was in place. Wang weighed the benefits and costs of this decision. In several ways, he faced a different political context compared to when he made the first critical decision. He understood it was unlikely that he could end the movement with a political solution. In addition to his failed negotiation attempts, key players, such as the ex-President, remained adamant in their support for the trade pact even at the latter stage of the movement. He realized that if the impasse between the activists and the administration continued, the public would still blame him for ineffectively dealing with the situation as the head of legislature (Anonymous May 2016).

At the same time, Wang also postulated that the movement would end eventually. If he did not participate earlier in facilitating the end of the movement, he would secure no political benefits but blame from the public. As one of my interviewee succinctly summarized the situation: “Wang knew that if he did not show his clear stance (support) when most options were ruled out, then he reaps no gains from this political game (when the movement ended)” (Anonymous May 2016). As a result, Wang was less concerned with the political ramifications of his announcement, as this situation had become one of political survival. The fear of blame and rejection from the public clearly outweighed concerns of political ramification in Wang’s announcement. In this situation, public opinion shaped Wang’s considerations of political interests, leading him to make the announcement.

Political Decision-Making Takes Time

Critics might still argue that if public opinion is as influential as I suggest, Wang should have reacted to the supportive public opinion by aligning with the movement in the first place. However, my interviewees suggest a more complicated mechanism. They considered the idea of immediate correspondence between public opinion and policy result as unrealistic: “political decision-making takes time... it takes time for politicians to observe public opinion and contemplate before reaching a conclusion. It is unrealistic to expect that politicians respond to public opinion with no time lag. Wang needs time to think about how to respond to public opinion in a way that would fit with his political interests” (Anonymous May 2016).

So, although Wang was cognizant of the substantial support the movement received, his support for the movement in the beginning (not to order police removal) was, at best, implicit: other key players in his party, including the President and the Premier, remained opposed to the

movement. Full alignment with the movement at such an early stage could have resulted in political strife. As a result, after the first initial decision, Wang resorted to traditional legislative mechanisms such as inter-party negotiations to mitigate the impact caused by his initial decision. In short, Wang was influenced by the public to eschew ordering the removal, but the alignment was unlikely to emerge so quickly given he still needed time to attempt other ways of reaching a compromise between political parties.

Why Elite Rivalry Was Not the Only Important Factor

Although public opinion influenced each of the critical decisions Wang made, it does not mean that elite rivalry had no influence. Elite rivalry formed the basis of political context that Wang faced throughout the movement, although it is clear that it does not drive all of his decisions. There are two reasons why the importance of elite rivalry may have been exaggerated in Wang's decision-making for two reasons: the unpredictability of social movement outcomes and the risks associated with following the path as guided by elite rivalry. On the uncertainties of social movement outcomes, my interviewees noted that at the early stages of the protest, few politicians, including Wang, knew how the movement would develop. The uncertainties and complexities of the political situation made it difficult for Wang to rush to make any political decision easily, contributing to the lag between perceiving public opinion and making an actual political decision (Anonymous May 2016).

Moreover, the path as indicated by elite rivalry assumed great political risks for Wang. Because the ex-President had been adamant in his position to push for ratification, if Wang held a grudge with the ex-President, he would choose the complete opposite policy position to thwart

Ma's goal. This is the essence of the elite rivalry argument; however, one of my interviewees told me, based on his close observations, of Wang's decision-making style:

“It (elite rivalry) is not the reason that he made such a decision because it entails too much political risks. As a seasoned politician, Wang analyzes the situation rationally. He knew that most in his party wanted to push for ratification, not just Ma. So, choosing the activist side directly would mean turning back on his comrades — the risk is too big for him — especially since many of them in the party, like Wang, are more pro-Taiwan. Wang would not abandon his base in the KMT just to get back at Ma. He made that decision (announcement) because he had to — the public wanted him to end the movement” (Anonymous May 2016).

In short, Wang would not make the announcement interpreted as aligning with the activists just for the sake of elite rivalry; it was too risky a step to take. The option became a possibility only because public opinion was also behind it. In other words, elite rivalry has always been an important factor, but it alone is insufficient to explain critical decisions without taking public opinion into consideration. Throughout the movement, both elite rivalry and public opinion shape Wang's decisions. In the beginning, when the political risks of following the path guided by elite rivalry contains too much political risk, even though the public was highly supportive of the movement, Wang was hesitant to make critical decisions and could at best support the movement implicitly. As the movement lingered and political solutions were exhausted, the political repercussions of breaking away from the party's default position become smaller (It has become an issue about Wang's political survival). Public opinion can motivate

Wang to make a swift announcement. In short, throughout the movement, both public opinion and elite rivalry are crucial factors behind Wang's political calculus of political risk.

Discussion

I entertained two hypotheses of alliance formation with the Sunflower Movement: elite rivalry and public opinion. Whereas some suggest that the predominant reason for the alliance is an elite rivalry within the elite's political party, I argue that the decision was shaped by both public opinion and elite rivalry. Through in-depth interviews with political elites and activists involved in this movement and secondary information, I found public opinion to be another major reason for Wang's alliance with the movement. The voice of the mass was just as important for Wang's decision-making because it Wang a sense of the stance of the public to reduce political risks of his decisions.

This case brings forth several theoretical contributions. First, it extends literature that studies the mediators of social movement success. While a previous study by Giugni and Passy (1988) found the influence of public opinion to be quite limited, this study suggests that public opinion is of great importance for the emergence of elite alliance. The decision not to use police force for activist ejection and the later alignment announcement would not have occurred if clear public opinion was nonexistent. The study supplements previous public opinion research by revealing an important causal pathway by which public opinion can cast influence on policy. In some circumstances, public opinion could be just as important of other critical political factors,

such as political parties, the legislative system, and even elite rivalry between top leaders in influencing political actors.

For studies of social movements, the study supports approaches by previous work that include public opinion, in addition to factors in political opportunity structure, in understanding the consequences of social movement (Giugni 2004). Social movement studies that focus on political factors tend to overlook the influence of public opinion (Manza and Brooks 2012). As the Sunflower Movement case demonstrates, focusing only on political factors without considering public opinion could falsely amplify the influence of political factors, and misattribute the elite alliance's underlying cause.

In terms of the influence of public opinion on elite decision-making, this study revealed the time lags between perception of public opinion and political alliance with social movements. Scholars often neglect the role of public opinion if they cannot observe the immediate correspondence between it and resulting policy. Such an expectation is unrealistic. Even in a short-lived movement like the Sunflower Movement, which lasted less than a month, it still takes time for politicians to contemplate and reflect on public opinion before making a decision. The time lag is contributed to by politicians' need to feel assured that the policy they pursue based on public opinion would not endanger their political interests. The time lag turns out to be beneficial for the movements, as it closes out other political possibilities. Whether it would be the same for other movements requires further investigation. Future studies could further probe the causal pathways of elite decision-making processes with respect to the influence of time lags on policy.

Lastly, the case shows that when public opinion has forced politicians to make promises, even if support has dropped, politicians are unlikely to back away from their earlier promises.

Doing so could tarnish their reputation and would increase the probability they will be penalized in elections. This fits with studies showing that politicians rarely back away from their own promises, whether at the state or federal level (Krukones 1984; Fishel 1985; Ringquist and Dasse 2004). Thus, a practical lesson for activists is that they can be reassured that once public opinion moves politicians to make promises, such promises will often last even if high support has waned.

Conclusion

This paper uses the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan as an empirical test to determine whether public opinion can play an important role in motivating politicians to become allies of social movements. The Sunflower Movement is a valuable case, as its brevity allows for the tracing of the development and the influence of events throughout the movement. With in-depth interviews with political elites and staff members in Taiwan, I reached a different finding than Ho (2015), who suggests the internal rivalry between the former President and the President of the Legislature to be the main reason for an elite alliance with the movement. I argue public support for the movement is just as important as elite rivalry to be the underlying reasons for the alliance and success of the movement. Elite rivalry alone cannot fully explain the alliance between elites and movement; as such an action contains great political risk. There are advantages for elites to pay attention to public opinion as it help them manage political repercussions of decisions. In the case of the Sunflower movement, the combination of both public opinion and elite rivalry both contribute to Wang's tide-turning announcement to postpone the trade pact. Overall, Taiwan's Sunflower Movement demonstrates that the influence of public opinion is often underestimated in helping social movements to build alliances with

elites to increase chances of success. The study also offers a practical lesson for social activists: once public opinion has moved political elites to stand with the movement, their support is unlikely to waver even if the public have changed their stance.

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