To CPW participants:

This is a partial draft of one of two Taiwan chapters of my dissertation. Right now I am struggling with what I want to accomplish with the case-study chapters. In my mind I have three things I could do with this chapter, but I’m not sure which makes the most sense here in the dissertation:

1. *Go general-to-specific*: Use the general comparative theory developed and tested in the rest of the dissertation to say something new about dominant party defeat in Taiwan. My audience would be mainly people who are interested in Taiwan’s political development. The argument would be along the following lines: Taiwanese scholars don’t have a full understanding of Taiwan’s democratization. My comparative analysis shows that a number of structural factors made the KMT’s defeat more certain and less contingent than most students of Taiwanese history have appreciated. I will draw on my general theory to reinterpret events in the history of Taiwan’s transition to democracy and construct a new narrative of this process.

2. *Go specific-to-general*: Use the Taiwan case study to argue against other comparative explanations of dominant party defeat. My audience would be mainly other comparative political scientists who are interested in explaining why dominant parties emerge, persist, and lose, but don’t necessarily care much about the details of the Taiwanese case. The argument would look something like this: comparativists are wrong in thinking that elections are adopted in single-party autocracies primarily for reasons internal to the regime—coalition management and so forth. I assert that they are adopted instead for external reasons: a strong domestic opposition, and a need to satisfy international allies whose support is crucial for the regime’s survival. I will illustrate that this is true for Taiwan.

3. *Put meat on the bones*: Use the Taiwan case to illustrate the causal mechanisms that are present in my general theory of dominant party persistence and defeat—that is, put some case-specific meat on the bones of the general theory. My audience would be mostly people interested in the general theory I develop in the rest of the dissertation, but who do not necessarily care about the Taiwan case. I will show how the theory works on the ground to help us understand better a specific case of dominant party defeat.

In writing this chapter I have repeatedly gotten hung up on the problem of audience—i.e. who am I actually trying to convince of what? Your thoughts about this problem, and more broadly about the best use of case studies in comparative politics, would be especially helpful.

The next pages provide a summary of the motivating questions, arguments, and findings of the dissertation. Following that is what amounts to a Cliff-notes version of Chapter 7, which is intended to illustrate how and why the transition to a multiparty regime occurred in Taiwan from the early 1970s onward.
Dissertation summary

In Chapter 1 of the dissertation I ask: why did the dominant party that ruled Taiwan for 50 years, the Kuomintang (KMT), lose power after a gradual, controlled transition to multiparty, contested elections? Comparativists who study dominant party persistence and defeat have tended to emphasize declining state and party resources as the main reason these parties lose elections, but this explanation does not account very well for the KMT's defeat in Taiwan. Is Taiwan just an oddball exception that can be ignored or is there something more fundamental that these theories of one-party dominance are missing? The rest of the dissertation is geared toward answering this question, through a combination of extensive cross-national comparison of dominant party regimes (and “failed” dominant parties) and intensive analysis of the process that led to KMT defeat in Taiwan.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature on dominant party regimes. I show that existing work is problematic for several reasons. Conceptually, scholars are inconsistent about what they call a dominant party regime, and they also do not agree on what the puzzle presented by these regimes is. Theory development has been very heavy on case-specific explanations and light on comparisons across more than a handful of cases. Theory testing has been beset by problems of measurement, selection bias, and a general disinterest in stating general claims in a way that would allow them to be falsified by cross-national comparison. And although some theories do have clear general implications, no one has tested them against one another. In response, I develop my own definition of a dominant party regime, explain why I think the phenomenon is interesting and puzzling, and present data that describe all the ruling parties in the world since 1950 that meet my definition. I also define and measure average duration of ruling parties in the comparison set of non-dominant parties—those which could have become dominant but did not. The variation in this dataset raises the comparative questions that motivate the following theoretical chapters. These are (1) why do single-party autocracies choose to adopt multi-party elections through which they could conceivably lose power? And (2) what explains the wide variation in ruling party duration when multiple parties are allowed to contest?
Chapter 3 presents my answer to the first question. In contrast to most recent explanations, which focus on internal regime dynamics, my theory emphasizes the importance of external actors—political pressure from both international regime allies and benefactors and domestic opposition movements can change the regime leadership’s expected payoffs of allowing opposition parties to contest elections relative to continuing one-party autocracy. But the regime leadership may still continue to suppress the opposition if the prospects of electoral defeat loom large. The transition from a single-party autocracy to a multi-party dominant party regime, then, is most likely to occur when the international and domestic benefits to the regime leadership of allowing contested elections are high, but the expectation of an opposition victory in those elections is low. A key consequence of this argument is that opposition movements in dominant party regimes tend to be electorally weak; otherwise, the ruling party would prevent contested elections from occurring in the first place, lest it lose them. Thus, understanding opposition party development is key to understanding variation in dominant party duration in power.

Chapters 4 and 5 develop my answer to the second question: what explains variation in ruling party duration across all competitive regimes? In Chapter 4, I develop an explanation of how institutional factors—regime type, electoral system, and degree of centralization—affect the ability of opposition parties to recruit good candidates and to coordinate in elections against the ruling party. I show how this explanation can account for a striking empirical regularity: dominant parties do not occur in presidential democracies, only in parliamentary ones. In Chapter 5, I argue for the importance of non-material issues to opposition party success or failure in electoral competition. Identity politics, I show, has played a critical role in sustaining some ruling parties in power while undercutting others. Both chapters conclude with a statement of hypotheses about how institutions and social structure affect the average duration in power of ruling parties in competitive regimes.

Chapter 6 will test several of the hypotheses developed in the previous three chapters on the universe of competitive regimes described in Chapter 2. I will test implications of my institutional
and social structural explanations against those of resource-asymmetry theories, among others, to see if my theory can account better for variation in ruling party duration in power.

Chapters 7 and 8 return to the question raised in the introduction: why did the KMT lose power in Taiwan? Chapter 7 illustrates how my theory can account for the transition to multi-party elections in Taiwan, while Chapter 8 shows how and why the opposition movement benefited immensely from two structural factors. Taiwan featured a moderate ethnic cleavage between the minority mainlanders, to whom the KMT was strongly linked, and the majority “native” Taiwanese, to whom the opposition consistently appealed. The fact that the ruling party had to sustain a cross-ethnic coalition while the opposition needed only to win over most “native” Taiwanese made the ruling party’s supporting coalition especially vulnerable to identity-based electoral appeals. And the fact that executives at both the local and national level were directly elected made both opposition recruitment of candidates and coordination of voters significantly easier than they would have been in a more centralized, parliamentary system.

Finally, in Chapter 9 I draw a set of general conclusions and note additional questions for research. I also discuss some of the implications of my findings for the process of political liberalization in the contemporary world, especially the prospects for political change in the People’s Republic of China, and the path that process is most likely to follow.
In what follows I present what is essentially a cliff-notes version of Chapter 7.

In this chapter, I show how the expected payoffs to the KMT leadership of continued suppression of regime opponents shifted dramatically beginning in the early 1970s. This shift culminated in the regime leader’s decision not to suppress regime opponents when they formed a new political party to contest elections, although competitive elections were only gradually opened up for all seats. This gradual process allowed the ruling party elite to increase their certainty that they could win most fully contested elections and retain power. The combination of high costs of suppression, the high probability of winning contested elections, and the high political payoff to the ruling party of retaining power through those elections led the leadership to adopt fully contested multiparty elections for the legislature in 1992 and the presidency in 1996.

Geopolitics

A central pillar of the KMT’s continued authoritarian rule on Taiwan was that it was the rightful government of all of China, and that it would at some point reassert control over the mainland. By the early 1960s, however, it was clear to most outside observers that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime’s control over Chinese territory was firm, and Chiang Kai-shek’s insistence that the KMT would eventually strengthen enough to retake the mainland looked increasingly delusional. Since the de facto end of the Chinese civil war in 1950, both the KMT and CCP insisted that any country wishing to establish formal diplomatic relations with one cut all ties with the other regime. The sheer size and importance of the Chinese mainland in relation to Taiwan, however, meant that as the divide across the Taiwan strait solidified, an increasing number of countries were willing to trade diplomatic relations with the ROC for those with the PRC, even those closely aligned with the United States. In 1968 the ROC had recognition from 64 countries, while the PRC had 45. By mid 1975, the PRC had 112, while the ROC had only 26.
Debates over which regime should control the Chinese seat on the UN Security Council were a regular occurrence since the body's founding, but in the 1950s and 1960s US pressure had been sufficient to block proposals to switch control from the ROC to the PRC. However, by 1971, the Soviet-aligned bloc in the General Assembly had attracted enough additional support—a 2/3 vote was required—to win approval of the switch. The ROC, facing expulsion, formally withdrew from the body on October 25, 1971. The loss of UN membership also meant the loss of ROC seats in other UN-affiliated organizations, and eventually in other prominent intergovernmental organizations. In 1980, the ROC lost membership in the World Bank and the IMF. Beginning in 1984, Taiwanese athletes were able to compete in the Olympic Games only under the awkward name “Chinese Taipei”.

Overall, the changing international environment shifted decisively against the regime in Taiwan. The succession of diplomatic setbacks dealt a serious political cost to the KMT, whose legitimacy centered on the party’s status as the rightful government of all of China.

**US-ROC Alliance**

The ROC’s alliance with the US was by far the most important of any diplomatic relations it had with any country. The United States had intervened in the early days of the Korean War to forestall a CCP invasion across the Taiwan Strait, and the US was bound by a mutual defense treaty, adopted in December 1954, to come to the island’s defense in case of a PRC attack. So indications of a weakening US commitment to defend the island and prop up the KMT regime were quite threatening. By the early 1970s, the signals from the KMT’s US ally became more ominous. The American commitment to its anti-communist allies in Asia looked weaker as public opinion soured against the Vietnam War. The Nixon administration placed a high priority on reaching some kind of accommodation with the PRC and widening the divide between the Chinese and Soviet regimes that had opened up in the 1960s. Nixon’s visit to China in 1972, among other events, suggested to the KMT leadership that the threat of global communism alone would no longer be enough to maintain
an American commitment to Taiwan’s defense. The Carter administration’s greater emphasis on human rights in US foreign policy put additional strain on the US alliance. In January 1979, the US finally normalized relations with the PRC, simultaneously cutting all formal ties with the ROC.

By the end of the 1970s, the regime on Taiwan had lost its UN seat, diplomatic recognition from most of the world’s countries, and all formal ties with its major benefactor and ally. The US commitment to support the KMT’s continued rule in Taiwan looked weaker than it had since 1950. In this context, the suppression of regime opponents, which the party leadership had pursued regularly and with great fervor in the 1950s and 60s, was increasingly costly to the regime’s leadership. The KMT could hardly hope to elicit renewed sympathy for its plight when regular reports of dissident beatings, detentions, and harassment appeared in State Department reports.

_Developments in the PRC_

Beginning in the late 1970s, major political changes in the People’s Republic of China also contributed to the KMT regime’s increasingly precarious political situation. A central rationale for western, especially American, diplomatic, military, and economic support for the ROC was the contrast with “Communist China” across the Strait. The KMT could point to the dire threat of invasion and CCP economic and political excesses to justify its continued authoritarian rule in Taiwan. But the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, followed by the gradual rise to power of the reformer Deng Xiaoping, led to a transformation in western views of the PRC regime. Deng’s economic and political reforms appeared to indicate a sustained shift away from the economic disruption and mass campaigns of the Cultural Revolution and toward a more liberal, market-oriented system. No longer was the distinction between “Communist China” and “Free China” so obvious to the knowledgeable observer; the ROC’s ban on opposition parties and the dearth of direct elections for the national government belied the KMT leadership’s claim that it presided over a morally superior democracy. Combined with increasing diplomatic isolation, the KMT regime’s
continued restrictions on opposition candidates and ban on opposition parties became increasingly costly to the leadership.

*Generational Change in the KMT*

A number of domestic trends also undercut the KMT’s legitimacy and raised the political cost of suppressing regime opponents. One was the accelerating die-off of most of the senior mainlander elite who had held political power on the island since 1950. Both the National Assembly, which formally elected the president, and the Legislative Yuan, which approved legislation, had not been reelected since 1948, ostensibly because, as representatives of “all of China,” most of their members were from districts under the control of the CCP. By the 1970s, legislators in both bodies were dying of old age at an average of one a week. The practice of having second- or third-place finishers in the 1948 elections replace deceased legislators served only as a stop-gap measure; they, too, were rapidly dying off. The visual of a geriatric legislative body rubber-stamping KMT-drafted legislation was increasingly damaging by the 1970s. “Supplementary” elections of additional legislators to replace those who had died began in 1969; in 1972, these were regularized as three-year positions to be elected from Taiwanese districts. While adding new members to the legislature and bolstering the regime’s democratic credentials, however, this concession also helped undermine the justification for retaining the remaining “eternal legislators”. The number of supplementary seats was gradually expanded each term, so that by 1989 about 1/3 of the legislature was directly elected by Taiwanese voters.

Chiang Kai-shek’s death in 1975 brought about a key leadership change. Chiang was succeeded by his son, Chiang Ching-kuo. The elder Chiang’s death opened up space for a more measured consideration of the regime’s long-term prospects within the party leadership. The increasing diplomatic and political isolation of the KMT appears to have weighed heavily on CCK, and played an important role in his eventual decision to lift martial law and to permit regime
opponents to form an opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), under which they could contest elections.

**Development of the Pro-Democracy Opposition Movement**

The increasing damage that suppression of opponents did to the KMT’s international position, and especially to its all-important alliance with the United States, created space for opponents of the regime to mobilize. And mobilize they did; a motley collection of disgruntled former KMT members, county-level faction leaders, independence advocates, and idealistic college students joined together in a loose affiliation that became known as the “Tangwai,” or “outside the Party”, movement. Opposition movement leaders started underground magazines and newspapers, campaigned for anti-KMT candidates, and organized street protests that tested the limits of the regime’s new tolerance for dissent. One of these protests, in Taiwan’s second-largest city of Kaohsiung in December 1979, turned into a violent riot, most likely as a result of KMT provocateurs in the crowd. The regime cracked down on the leadership of the Tangwai movement and sentenced several to long prison terms. Concern for the KMT’s international reputation and its delicate relationship with the United States, however, led Chiang Ching-kuo to order that they receive publicly televised trials—a move which backfired by bringing more attention to the dissidents and making household names of the young group of lawyers who defended them. By the mid-1980s, the KMT felt constrained enough by alliance concerns to refrain from overt suppression of opponents. In several cases, the ruling party contracted out attacks on regime critics to members of organized crime groups in order to maintain plausible deniability of the party’s own involvement. Such attacks usually backfired, bringing additional international and domestic attention to dissidents and raising their profiles.

All of these factors—the international environment, the ROC’s alliance with the US, reforms in the PRC, the death of much of the mainland elite in the KMT, and the rise of a more contentious
opposition movement—pushed the costs to the KMT leadership of suppressing regime opponents higher. But if the opposition had been strong enough to win such elections, suppression would still have been preferable to tolerance, because only suppression would keep the leadership in power.

The second critical factor in the decision to allow opposition contestation was the gradual recognition that the KMT’s political monopoly would not be seriously threatened by the opposition, at least in the short run. The high probability that the KMT would win fully contested elections, combined with the huge international and domestic political payoff such a win would bring, made contested elections a more and more enticing prospect to the party’s leadership.

Gradual Concessions

The cost of suppressing regime opponents had clearly risen over the 1970s, so that by 1980 the swift detention and prosecution of members of the opposition movement threatened to damage the support the regime had from the domestic population and its US ally. Yet allowing opponents to form a political party and run for national office, as they demanded, also posed a serious threat to the regime’s hold on power. A key point of concern was whether the KMT leadership could retain control over the nomination process and still manage to win most races. The peculiar structure of the regime’s institutions, with direct elections for local and provincial-level offices but not national ones, kept the stakes of toleration lower than they otherwise would have been. The KMT managed to retain control of a large majority of the directly elected Legislative Yuan seats in 1980, 1983, 1986, and 1989, and won most of the county executive seats in elections in 1981, 1985 and 1989. In the Taiwan provincial legislature, which had always been directly elected, the party retained a large majority even after the DPP was founded in 1986. These repeated successes in local elections increased the leadership’s confidence that it could retain majorities in the national legislature and national assembly if all seats were contested.
KMT Electoral Resources

The KMT’s impressive success rate in local elections was due to several advantages. The party had lots of experience in competitive contests for elected office, having allowed independents to run against its nominees in most cases since the 1950s. The party also had a vast array of “captive voters” which it could turn out to vote, including military villages, members of the civil service, workers at state-owned enterprises, and rural farmer’s association members. It also possessed a near-monopoly over print and broadcast media well into the 1980s, so it could promote its candidates heavily. And if all else failed, it could and did turn to outright vote-buying—using its extensive network of local party operatives, the party would direct payments of cash or gifts to voters in contested districts. Taiwan’s rapid economic growth (its economy grew an average of 8% a year from 1960-1990) greatly enriched the party’s coffers, so that by the 1980s it had over a billion dollars in assets which it could draw on to fund campaigns. All these advantages helped reassure KMT leaders that their candidates could win openly contested elections for even the national legislature and the presidency.

Opposition Weakness

The flip side of KMT electoral strength was opposition electoral weakness. Like most opposition parties in hegemonic party regimes, the DPP proved initially to be better at organizing protests and putting public pressure on the regime than at campaigning for and winning elected office. The two tasks were in some ways contradictory; to put pressure on the regime to make liberalizing concessions, the opposition movement was best served by appearing radical and by taking polarizing actions that brought attention to their cause. The same actions, however, could be used against them in election campaigns, where appealing to a narrow segment of fervent supporters would not get the party a majority at the ballot box. The DPP had a reputation for disorganization, an unruly group of leaders, and a set of contradictory and sometimes incoherent demands that could
easily be portrayed as dangerous by the ruling party. Thus, if the DPP had been a more disciplined, organized force, the threat to the KMT of adopting elections would have been greater.

*Increasing Costs of Suppression + Increasing Expected Benefits of Toleration = Multiparty Elections*

The rising international and domestic political costs to the regime of suppressing its opponents made contested elections a more attractive option by the 1980s. In September 1986, response to the provocative step by the Tangwai of organizing an official opposition party, the DPP, KMT leader Chiang Ching-kuo announced that the regime would tolerate the new party and allow its candidates to compete under the party’s banner in the 1986 year-end supplementary legislative elections. Shortly afterward, CCK announced that the period of martial law, which had been in effect since 1949, would be lifted in July 1987. Restrictions on newspapers and other print journalism were loosened next, followed by the release of some political prisoners and reform of the security apparatus. CCK died in March 1988 and was succeeded by vice president Lee Teng-hui, a native Taiwanese and a moderate in the KMT distrusted by hardliners. LTH’s accession to the leadership of the party set off a prolonged power struggle that eventually culminated in an agreement to force all remaining “eternal legislators” to retire. The National Assembly was first fully elected in 1991, and the Legislative Yuan in 1992. As expected, the KMT won large majorities in both these elections. The process of institutional reform culminated in an agreement between moderates in the DPP and the KMT to adopt direct election of the president. Finally, in March 1996, Lee Teng-hui was re-elected in the first direct election for that office in Taiwan’s history, and the KMT retained control of the executive. The party had for all intents and purposes successfully managed to transform the regime from an autocratic one to a democratic one, reaping the benefits of renewed international and domestic legitimacy without having its grip on power seriously threatened.