Does the Sunflower Bloom in the Local Politics? Exploring the Performance of Young Candidates in 2014 Village and Li Election

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Abstract

One feature of the Sunflower Movement in early 2014 is the increasing political participation among young Taiwanese. Following the trend, opposition parties and civic groups declared programs to support young Taiwanese running in the village and li chief election, both of which are the legacy of the Japanese colonial social control as well as the foundation of party machine during KMT military government. Did the sunflower bloom in the local election and then change the local politics? Analysis of the election outcome, however, renders mixed results. On the one hand, compared with 2010 election, fewer young challengers (Age¡40) ran this time, and in average they received less ballots and won less seats. After propensity score matching, evidence shows that the appearance of new young candidate did not increase turnout. On the other hand, however, the young candidate would indirectly change the election result. Among the districts that incumbent faced the same challenger in both 2010 and 2014, the additional young new candidate attracted more votes from the incumbent than the challenger, reducing the relative strength between the two. As a result, the reelection
rate of the incumbent dropped from 71% to 45%. These findings suggest that the barrier against young people running in election is still high, and even the important political event like Sunflower and the electoral resource provided were not enough to overcome it.

Introduction

The Sunflower Movement in March 2014 is undoubtedly one of the most important political event in Taiwan. Hundreds of thousands protesters occupied the Parliament (Legislative Yuan) and nearby blocks, requiring the authority to reconsider the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA hereafter) and decelerate the cross-strait economy cooperation. According to an on-site survey during the movement conducted by (Chen, 2014), the average age of the participants is 28, with 67% of the participants below 30. Moreover, 56% of the participants are students, but there are also almost half of the protesters had graduated from school. Another online survey conducted on the third day of the movement (PollcracyLab, 2014) shows that 81% of subjects under 30 supported the occupation, compared to 32% holding supportive attitudes among the subjects over 50. Therefore, the Sunflower movement is better characterized as a movement of the young generation rather than of the students only.

In democratic system, legitimacy of power and capability of policy implementation is approved through general election. Since the Sunflower movement was vividly imaged as the young generation, young people were also expected to play the crucial rule in the following 9-in-1 election in later 2014; they had come out and protest, so they might be willing to run in election against the ruling party Kuomintang (KMT hereafter). Especially, the major opposite party Democratic Progress Party (DPP hereafter), accompanied with Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU hereafter) and numerous civil groups, actively encouraged young people
to run in 2014 village and li election. They believe the young candidate can “overturn the local politics”.

Village and li chief are the lowest elected position in Taiwan. It was originally designed by the Japanese colonial government as a social-control system(Yao, 2008). After the KMT government retreated to Taiwan, the position were opened for electoral competition, but it was soon integrated into the party machine for electoral mobilization and clientalism(Wang, 1997) under the context of military rule. While Taiwan started its democratization process, the majority of the village and li chief were KMT or prone to KMT. DPP, TSU, and civil groups believed that the existing incumbents in village and li are the reason to keep KMT strong, and the young and new candidates stemmed from the Sunflower movement left opened the possibility of defeating the incumbents and uprooting the influence of KMT in local politics. Including DPP’s Democratic Grass ¹, TSU’s Young People Running Li Election², and civil groups like Let’s Run in Village and Li Election³ and Youth Occupy Politics ⁴, finance and educational resource and even party nomination were provided to attract and encourage young people to run in village and li election.

Given the atmosphere and resource preferring the young generation, theirs effectiveness in election is open to question. Does the sunflower also bloom in the Local Politics? This article focuses on the performance of young candidate in the post-Sunflower 9-in-1 election. If the movement had successfully transformed its momentum into the election, and if the resource provided was helpful, empirical evidence should be found in the 2014 village and li election result. For example, more young candidates are expected to run in election, to receive more votes compared with those in previous election.

The examination of the performance of the young candidates in 2014 election is especially important owing to the context the election embedded in. Human beings are mortal. Age is one of the many important personal characteristics that candidates provide as cognitive heuristics of competitiveness and quality(Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). People tend to match
certain jobs with specific age-group (Perry, Kulik and Bourhis, 1996; Perry and Bourhis, 1998); in politics, middle-age candidates are usually preferred than too young or too old candidates (Banducci et al., 2008; Armstrong and Graefe, 2011); youth implies inexperience, while old indicates inability. In Taiwan, previous electoral studies render no consensus on the relationship between candidate’s age and competitiveness. Some studies suggest that Taiwanese voters also prefer middle-age candidates in some elections (Huang and Lin, 2007; Wang, 2015b), while others fail to find such correlation in other cases (Sheng, 2008; Hsu and Lin, 2012; Wang, 2015a).

Compared with previous studies, the 2014 village and li election is a extreme but generalizable case. Since the atmosphere and resource prefer young candidates, they should preform the best than those in previous elections, controlling for existing electoral system and political culture. If young candidates’ performance in this election is not better than previous ones, it may imply that the existing system discriminates young candidates to the level that even the tremendous youth movement and electoral resource fail to overcome.

Exploring the Influence of Sunflower in 9-in-1 Election

This article suggests three different dimensions to explore the performance of young candidates in 2014 village and li election: supply, demand, and spillover.

Supply Side

First of all, if the Sunflower movement indeed raised the level of political participation among the young generation, more young people would come out and run in the election because it is the direct way to control the authority and provide the alternative to all voters. If the Sunflower movement is a effective treatment, we should observe that more young candidates ran in the post-Sunflower election.
Demand Side

Second, as a salient political event, the Sunflower movement may change the stereotype that voters hold toward the young generation. When the impression was brought to the booth, it made young candidates on the ballot much attractive. If it is the case, young candidates should receive more votes than those in previous elections. Moreover, the young candidates may also attract more voters coming out and vote because people may perceive higher expected utility once the young candidates won the election.

\[ H_{2-1}: \text{The voteshare young candidates received is higher in 2014} \]
\[ H_{2-2}: \text{The number of chief won by young candidates is larger in 2014} \]
\[ H_{2-3}: \text{The turnout rate is higher in district with young candidate than without.} \]

Spillover Effect

Apart from demand and supply, the emphasis of the young generation on the Sunflower movement may raise the new issue dimension among the voters\(^{(1)}\). The new issue dimension may change the relative policy distances among candidates and voters, which stirs the status quo of local politics. The village and li chief is elected through Single-Member-District, so the enter of the young candidates may take away voteshare from both incumbent and existing challenger.

Who will be influenced much? Since the village and li chief were mostly KMT-based, and previous studies show that young voters show less support toward KMT, it is much likely that the young candidates and the new dimension on ageism in post-Sunflower election will decrease more voteshare on challengers than it does on incumbents. Thus, if the young
candidate abruptly runs in the local election instead of cooperating with existing challenger, the decision would instead enlarge the difference between incumbent and challenger, and make incumbent less likely to step down.

\( H_{3-1} \): Adding one young candidate to district increases the relative strength between incumbent and challenger

\( H_{3-2} \): Adding one young candidate to district increases possibility of incumbent being reelected.

**Data and Measurement**

On the website of the Central Election Commission\(^5\), 2014 and 2010 are the only two years that village and li election result is available. Result of earlier elections are either lost or not friendly for coding and analysis (Wang, 2015\(^b\)). Assuming the Sunflower movement as a treatment, I will only examine my hypothesis basing on the comparison between the results of 2010 and 2014 elections. The candidates’ age, gender, district, incumbency, and voteshare are available on the website, which is enough for the hypothesis testing.

In the hypotheses the young candidate is used as a category, but what is the definition of ”young”? In this article, I define the candidates under 40 as young candidates. This definition is used by both major party KMT\(^6\) and DPP\(^7\) as their youth league.

Before hypothesis testing, a brief description of the 2014 and 2010 village and li election can help understand the context and characteristic of the election.

In the 2014 village and li election, there are 7848 districts. Among the 14137 candidates, 2633 (18.6%) are nominated by KMT, 718 (5.1%) by DPP, and 45 by other minor parties; the majority of the candidate is non-partisan. But as is mentioned earlier, due to the historical legacy in Taiwan, many of the non-partisan candidates is pro-KMT. Overall 6921 incumbents sought for reelection, and 5513 of them were successfully reelected. Therefore,
the percentage of reelection is about 70.2%, which is not uncommon in local election with Single-Memeber-District rule.

Fortunately, 2010 village and li election reflected almost the same pattern. In the election, there are 7831 districts. The number is different from 2014 due to minor realignment. Among the 15428 candidates, 3506(22.7%) are KMT, 583 (3.7%) by DPP, and 6 from minor parties. Still, the majority of the candidates is not nominated by ant party. However, due to the upgrade of many counties and cities (the Five Special Municipalities), there is no complete data of incumbency in the 2010 election (Wang, 2015b). However, there are 74.5% of li chief were got reelected in Taipei City, and 71.5 % were reelected in counties excluding the five special municipalities.

Overall, the 2014 and 2010 village and li elections are similar in many contextual factors. Therefore, comparison of the two cases can help estimate the influence of the Sunflower movement happened between them.

Performance of the young candidates after Sunflower

Supply Side: More young candidates devoted themselves?

If the Sunflower movement successfully raised the level of political participation among the young generation, and if the subsidy and resource provided by opposite parties and civil groups did work, then we should observe that more young candidate decided to run in the local election.

In the 2014 village and li election, there were 730 candidates were under 40, which accounts for 5.2% of all 14137 candidates. Besides, the average age of all candidates is 56.8, with median 58. In comparison, however, in 2010 the number of young candidates is 901, 5.8% of all 15428 candidates. The mean and median age of the candidates are 55.1 and 56, respectively. To exclude the influence of incumbency, 599 of the 730 young candidates in
2014 are challengers, and in 2010 the number of challenger is 797 out of the 901.

Since the two datasets are the whole population instead of sampling, statistical testing is unnecessary; comparing mean is enough to falsification. Existing evidence fails to support $H_{1-1}$ and $H_{1-2}$ - the number of young candidates did not increase after the Sunflower movement, granted the resource provided.

**Demand Side: More people supported young candidates?**

Even if the Sunflower failed to push more young people to run in election and present as an alternative on the ballot, it is also possible that voters were influenced by the movement and found the existing young candidates as much attractive. Therefore, voters would come out and support the young candidates in the post-Sunflower election.

In the 2014 election, the average voteshare received by young candidates is 42.2%, which is lower than the overall average 55.5% (The percentage is larger than 50% owing to many one-candidate uncontested districts). In 2010, young candidates got 42.8% of total votes. If we focus on the districts with only an incumbent and a challenger ($n = 3276$), in average challenger received 44.5% of total votes, but the voteshare of the young challengers were 43.7%.

Besides, 291 of 730 (39.8%) young candidates in 2014 won the election, but in 2010 the proportion is 390 of 901 (43.3%). Overall 3.7% of winner in 2014 election are under 40, while in 2010 the proportion is 5.0%. The comparison of 2010 and 2014 election results reveals that voters did not show much support to the young candidates after the Sunflower movement. Election results failed to support $H_{2-1}$ and $H_{2-2}$.

When it comes to turnout, the theoretical logic is that young candidate can present as an alternative so that more people are willing to come out and vote. In this logic, the young candidate is defined as a treatment to existing local political competition. Figure 1 shows the average turnout rate under different scenarios, and the parenthesis under each condition
is the number of district in 2014 election. In this figure, the effect of adding one more young candidate to existing district on turnout rate is limited. It is clear that the turnout rate in the district with ”one old and one young” competition is higher than one-candidate ones, but the effect is indiscernible with ”one old and one another old” competition. In other words, competition spurs turnout, but the effect is nothing to do with the age of the candidates. Since in the previous section it is clear that the number of young candidate did not increase, it also implied that the Sunflower movement did not make the election much competitive, so it provided little help to the turnout rate.

Figure 1: Turnout Rate in District with different candidate composition

However, it can be possible that there is problem endogeneity on estimating the effect of young candidate on turnout. It may be possible that the decision of the young candidate to run in election is related to the election condition of the district in previous election; if it is the case, the treatment of entering young candidate is biased and therefore the estimation of the effect is biased. To deal with this problem, Rubin (1974) suggests Propensity Score matching mechanism to estimate the treatment effect by matching close cases in the dataset. In the first step, the mechanism of treatment assignment is estimated by logit model, in which the dependent variable is binary coded by having the treatment or not, and independent variable is all of the possible covariates that influence the assignment. Then the model is used to generate the probability that each sample is treated, and the cases with the same
probability of treatment but in different condition (treated or not) will be paired together. This step helps eliminate potential bias on the treatment assignment. In the end, all we need to do is to compare the mean between treatment and control group, and the difference is the estimated treatment effect.

For the case of 2014 village and li election in Taiwan, the treatment is adding one more candidate (either young or old) to the district. The possible covariates I used includes the effective number of candidates in 2010 election, whether the incumbent sought reelection, and the number of electorates in the district. The MatchIt package in R is used for estimation with the ”nearest” method, and all of the codes can be found on the author’s personal website.

After the propensity score matching, the pure effect on turnout rate of adding one more candidate to single candidate district is 6.3% ($p < 0.000$, from 66.6% to 72.9%). In comparison, the effect of adding one more young candidate is 4.5% ($p < 0.000$, from 66.3% to 70.8%). When it comes to district with already two candidates, the effect on turnout of adding one more candidate is insignificant (0.28%, $p = 0.44$, from 71.8% to 72.0%), which is the same as adding one more young candidate (0.59%, $p = 0.51$, from 70.6% to 71.2%). Both point estimation and propensity score method failed to support $H_{2−3}$.

To summarize, the young candidates in 2014 village and li election did not perform better than those of 2010. They did not receive more votes after the Sunflower movement. What is worse, the number of young chiefs dropped from 390 to 291 in four years. When it comes to increasing turnout, the effect of adding one more young candidates is indistinguishable with the elder ones. Overall, there is no evidence that the Sunflower movement increases the level of political participation on both candidates and voters in 2014 village and li election.
Spillover Effect: Breaking the Status Quo?

In village and li election, it is not uncommon that the incumbent will compete with the same challenger for times. Among the 7848 districts in the 2014 election, 1247 (15.9%) incumbents faced the same opponent they had won over four years ago. In 2014, the re-election rate of the incumbent is about 70.2%, which implies that the challenger has few chance of winning. However, many of the challengers themselves were also strong enough to fight for times. For example, Tsai and Wang (2007) point out that the challengers in local politics would create or become the leader of community development association so as to accumulating enough mobilization ability to challenge the incumbent village and li chief.

What would happen, then, if a young and unexperienced candidate suddenly jumped into the election and become the alternative option? Before this episode, the traditional competition in the SMD like village and li election is all about the two major candidates. They mobilized ballots through personal network, clientalism, or party identity, all of which are relatively stable across time. When a new face joined the competition, the contextual change would bring at least one more issue dimension into existing election, which might change the relative distance between candidates and voters.

In the 2014 village and li election, there are 49 districts fitting this scenario exactly. One incumbent and one challenger fought against each other in both 2010 and 2014 election, but one young candidate participated into the game in 2014 as well. To estimate the effect of the incoming young candidates, once again the propensity score matching is used. The control group includes all districts with one incumbent and one re-running challenger, and the treatment group is defined as the composition of incumbent, re-running challenger, and a new young candidate. In the matching equation, the two independent variables are the number of effective candidate in district in 2010, and the number of electorates. After matching by the nearest method, 49 treatment-control pairs are selected.

Figure 2 shows the effect of adding one more young candidate into the district on the
voteshare difference between incumbent and challenger. In the control group, which is shown as the red line in the figure with 95% confidence interval around, the voteshare difference between the incumbent and challenger in 2010 is, in average, 16.0%. In 2014, the difference was narrowed to 8.1%; the incumbent received in average 54%, while the challenger got 46%. The decrease of gap may be contributed to the mature of the challenger, or the incumbent disadvantage. Even though the voters were choosing among the same options again, many of them would still change their mind owing to retrospective thinking. In the treatment group, however, the difference between incumbent and challenger is 19.5% in 2010. In 2014 when a young candidate joined the election, the difference dropped sharply to only 3.3%; the incumbent got 40.4%, challenger 37.1%, and the young candidate 22.5%.

![Figure 2: Effect of Adding young candidate on the gap between Incumbent and Challenger](image)

This analysis is informative in many aspects. The incoming young candidate will attract vote from both the supporters of the incumbent and existing challenger, but in average the incumbent was influenced by the episode much. Even though the young candidate had the least chance of winning, he or she can indirectly influence the relative strength between the incumbent and the challenger. In view of formal theory, the young candidate is represented as a new reference point, which makes voter to consider the incumbent more extreme, or
the challenger more moderate. Therefore, the evidence provide here clearly rejects $H_{3-1}$ - adding one young candidate will in fact decrease the gap between incumbent and challenger.

Similar result can be found in Figure 3. In this figure, the dependent variable is the reelection rate of the incumbent in 2014. In the competition with the same opponent and without the interference of others (that is, in the control group), the winning rate in 2010 is 100% since they are incumbent in 2014; but in 2014 the reelection rate is about 71.4%, which is close to the population mean (70.2%). When the young candidate vowed to participate, however, incumbents’ reelection rate dropped tremendously to 45.0%. The evidence provided here is opposite to $H_{3-2}$. Therefore, the adding of young candidate indirectly undermines the stability of local politics.

![Figure 3: Effect of Adding young candidate on the reelection rate of the Incumbent](image)

**Conclusion: The Bud Unbloomed**

Does the Sunflower Bloom in the Local Politics? Analysis of the performance of young candidates in 2014 village and li Election suggests both a bad and a good news. For the bad one, there is no evidence that more young people chose to run in election after the Sunflower
Movement, nor did they become much attractive to voters. After the 2014 election, the number of young chief is in fact less than in 2010. The electoral resource provided by DPP, TSU, and other civil groups is, if not nothing, not significantly effective at least in this election. For the good one, however, once a young candidate decided to join the game, evidence shows that he or she would indirectly change the result; the young candidate will not win, but he or she will help the challenger defeat the incumbent.

In democratic system, the most common and legitimate form of changing policy and control the authority is to win the election and replace the incumbent. As is discussed at the beginning, the 2014 village and li election is an extreme but generalizable case. Given the atmosphere of social movement and the electoral resource provided, we should observe more young people chose to run in the election. Due to the historical legacy, the degree of difficulty, and the electoral resource focusing, we should observe more young people chose to run in village and li election in 2014. However, empirical evidence extinguishes the optimism.

This no-finding suggests that the barrier against Taiwanese young people running in election is so high that given the Sunflower movement and the resource failed to overcome it. Even though they may change the election result at the end, they chose not to participate in at the beginning. In Taiwan, people under 40 accounts for 38.4% of adult population in 2014. Yet in the village and li only less than 5% of the chiefs are young. The reason why and how the public in Taiwan discriminates the young candidate needs further exploration, but at least the Sunflower Movement seems not reverting the tendency.

Notes

1 http://www.grass.tw/
2 https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.825430654136514.1073741877.191702400842679&type=1
3 https://www.facebook.com/eemmt
4 https://www.facebook.com/YouthOccupyPolitics
5http://db.cec.gov.tw/
7http://www.grass.tw/
8http://sites.duke.edu/austinwang/working-papers/
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