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Television Coverage of the 1995 Legislative Election in Taiwan: Rise of Cable Television as a Force for Balance in Media Coverage

Ven-hwei Lo, Edward Neilan, and Pu-tsung King

This research examines how television reported the campaign, parties, and candidates during the 1995 Legislative Election in Taiwan. Results of this study showed that state-owned broadcast television stations were far more likely than privately owned cable television channels to give greater coverage to the ruling party and its candidates, to use ruling party officials as news sources, and to offer more news coverage favorable to the ruling party than to other parties. We conclude that cable television has become a force for balance in coverage, diluting a pervasive pro-government party bias. The rise of cable television from virtual "outlaw" status to government-licensed status appears to have responded to a more liberal society and made a contribution to the development of democracy, as have the expanded elections themselves.

Before the emergence of cable television, Taiwan was served by three state-controlled broadcast television stations. The triple alliance of the government, the military, and the ruling party (Kuomintang, KMT) has monopolized the television industry (Lee, 1993). Consequently, television coverage of election campaigns was overwhelmingly pro-KMT and its candidates, while coverage of opposition candidates was precisely the opposite (Lo, 1994).

In 1993, the government lifted a twenty-two year ban on the establishment of new television stations and enacted a law to legalize the booming cable industry (Peng, 1994). As a result, many privately owned television systems have entered the market to take advantage of a new era of openness. Taiwan's television industry has entered a new phase marked by unprecedented competition and broader freedom in news coverage (Yang, 1996).

Taiwan's press freedoms and level of democracy have been substantially improved since the lifting of martial law in 1987. Before rescinding martial law, Taiwan was a one-party state. The ruling KMT was Taiwan's only legal, active political party, and opposition parties were prohibited (although non-KMT members had

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contested seats in elections at various levels).

As a result of the revocation of martial law, many political parties were established. In 1994, there were a total of 75 registered parties in Taiwan (CNA, 1996). However, only the two largest opposition parties, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the New Party (NP), were able to challenge the KMT in both local and national elections.

The 1995 election was the first Legislative Election in Taiwan in which there was fierce competition among the three major parties, each of which had a fairly good chance of winning a considerable number of seats. The election was also the first to be covered by Taiwan's privately owned cable television channels.

The purpose of this study is to compare how the privately owned cable television channels and the state-owned broadcast television stations reported the campaign, the parties, and the candidates during the 1995 Legislative Election in Taiwan. Two questions are pursued. Do the newly established cable television channels give fair treatment to all the parties and candidates? Is there any difference in election coverage between the state-owned broadcast television stations and the privately owned cable television channels? We begin with a brief discussion of the structure and function of television in Taiwan, followed by a review of literature on press coverage of election campaigns and a description of the methodology of this study.

The Structure and Function of Television in Taiwan

Before the emergence of cable television, Taiwan was served by three state-owned broadcast television stations. The Taiwan Television Company (TTV) was controlled by the Taiwan Provincial Government, which owned 49% of the shares of TTV stock. The China Television Company (CTV) was primarily owned by the KMT (68%). The Chinese Television System (CTS) was owned by the Ministry of Defense (72%) and the Ministry of Education (10%) (Lo, Cheng, & Lee, 1994).

The ruling KMT owns majority shares of the three television stations. Main policy guidelines are uniform across stations, although sometimes the stations engage in turf battles of various kinds. The Taiwan Provincial Government, Ministries of Defense and Education, TTV, CTV, and CTS are all controlled by the government/KMT monolith.

Therefore, the government has effectively controlled all three broadcast television stations and could easily exercise control over the television industry's major appointments, finances, and content (Lee, 1993). This works in practice by the fact that most high-ranking officials of the stations are simultaneously high-ranking KMT members. Above them, boards of directors all bear conspicuous political credentials—retired or current generals, ministers, party functionaries, or major business industrialists. Most of the general managers appointed to head the three broadcast television stations were ex-military men or party functionaries (Lo, Cheng, & Lee, 1994). At the other end of the roster, about 74% of the journalists at the three stations are members of the KMT (Lo, 1995), although not appointed by the government.

Policy shaped by the upper levels was dutifully carried out by reporters and editors, and policy adherence checked both before broadcasts and in post-broadcast

critiques. A dissident or maverick reporter or editor did not last long under this particular arrangement, which is definitive "gatekeeping" characteristic of Taiwan: a harmony shaped through consensus agreed to when a reporter first takes the job. It resembles Shoemaker's (1991) notion of gatekeeping in its most general sense, but the specifics are definitely Taiwan-style. The Taiwanese version includes Confucian precepts of respect for authority that Westerners might view as blatant censorship.

For example, a reporter coming up through the ranks becomes part of the system. The individuality Western reporters might employ by expressing a pang of conscience over a story would generally be prohibited or inhibited in Taiwan by hierarchical respect. If a reporter disagreed strongly, he or she would privately resign later without embarrassing the senior editor.

As a result, television was consciously used for political ideological control. Television coverage of political events was carefully watched by the government. Politically sensitive subjects were avoided while dissenting views were suppressed, ridiculed, or ignored (Lo, Cheng, & Lee, 1994).

By contrast, most of the cable television channels in Taiwan began as and continue to be privately owned. As in many other countries, cable television began in Taiwan as community antenna television services to remote areas where broadcast television reception was inadequate (Nazzaro, 1996). Many community antenna system owners soon found they could attract subscribers by offering diversified cable television services (Government Information Office, 1995).

Under Community Television Rules, cable operators could only relay the existing broadcast television signals to communities. And, there was no law in Taiwan allowing transmission of extra signals or redistribution of satellite programs (Peng, 1994). Therefore, cable television was illegal in Taiwan from its inception.

Owing to its limited viewership, cable television was initially ignored by the government. By the 1980s, cable television expanded rapidly to include satellite television programming from Japan and Hong Kong and became a serious alternative to the state-controlled broadcast television. Realizing it could no longer afford to ignore the existence of cable, the government launched a vigorous campaign between 1983 and 1988 to crack down on illegal cable operators, resulting in the government cutting thousands of illegal cables (Lewis, Slade, & Wei, 1996).

Despite the government's anti-cable campaign, cable television continued to grow in Taiwan. By 1991, cable television subscribers were estimated at more than 600,000 (Liu, 1994). It was clear that government efforts to ban cable television had failed. Facing tremendous pressure from the United States and harsh criticism from opposition parties, the government finally decided to open up the market for cable television by changing its regulatory rules. In 1993, the government passed the Cable Television Law to legalize the booming cable television industry.¹

Since then, cable television has grown rapidly. By 1994, about 42% of Taiwan's total television households subscribed to cable television services (Liu, 1994). By 1996, the proportion has soared to 70%, and the subscription rate continues to rise (Liu, 1996). Cable penetration in Taiwan is now higher than in the United States ("By the numbers," 1996) and far higher than in both Japan and Australia (Liu, 1994). Currently, about nine cable television channels program regular news programs. These supplement the three state-owned broadcast television stations, which are

also carried on cable. Cable television has become a major competitor to the state-controlled broadcast television stations.

Media Ownership and Control of News Content

Concern about owner influence on media content has been a central theme in media study. Past research has demonstrated that media owners have direct or indirect influence on media content (Browning, Grierson, & Howard, 1984; Donohue, Olien, & Tichenor, 1985). Bagdikian (1989), for example, found that Rupert Murdoch repeatedly used his papers to support Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Chan and Lee (1988) studied the Hong Kong press and found that the party-owned press was more likely than the non-party press to exercise policy control with respect to the coverage of social conflicts. In a comparative study of election news coverage by state-owned and private news media in Taiwan, Lo (1994) found that state-owned newspapers and television stations were far more likely than private newspapers to use KMT officials as news sources and to contain more news coverage favorable to KMT than to other parties.

Although few owners impose direct control on media content, they do have the ability to decide news policies and thereby to control media content (Graber, 1989). Shoemaker and Reese (1991) state that "the personal attitudes and values of news media owners may be reflected not only in editorials and columns, but also in news and features" (p. 223). They believe media operations and content are ultimately shaped by those who own them. Shoemaker and Reese contend that, by establishing organizational goals and policies, "media owners have an unmistakable impact on media content" (p. 137).

At least one study has supported Shoemaker and Reese's assertions about content. In a content analysis of the 1988 presidential election coverage in two Washington, DC newspapers, Kenney and Simpson (1993) demonstrated that ownership and financing were important factors determining news content. They found that news coverage by *The Washington Post*, a publicly owned company concerned with making profits, was more balanced and neutral, but news coverage by *The Washington Times*, a private company concerned with promoting conservative, anti-communist views, was biased in favor of the Republicans.

The 1995 Legislative Election in Taiwan offers an opportunity to examine the impact of media ownership on television election coverage in a country outside the United States, because Taiwan's television industry exhibits two ownership patterns: state and private. For the private cable television systems, profit, as well as political intent, motivates production of news reports attractive to audiences. Because cable operators cannot guarantee new viewers merely by "bashing" the KMT or supporting particular opposition candidates, the appeal may be won through more balanced programming.

This evolution has been seen in the newspaper industry as well. When press freedoms were introduced, the leading mass-circulation newspapers *United Daily News* and the *China Times* altered their strict pro-government, pro-KMT policy positions to show less bias (Lo, 1989).

This was necessary to retain readers whose disaffection with heavily pro-government, pro-KMT bias led them to subscribe to newly-independent or opposition newspapers. With million-plus circulations, these newspapers were highly sensitive to reader reactions. While the ownership of the papers may have remained basically pro-KMT, increasing objectivity was required for them to continue to be commercially competitive and successful (Lee, 1993). A similar progression seems to be likely in television. The impetus for change has come from cable television channels' diverse pattern of ownership as opposed to the monolithic ownership pattern of state-run stations.

For the state-owned broadcast television stations, however, the primary goal is not to sell news but to use the media as vehicles for supporting and advancing the policies of the government or serving as mouthpiece for the ruling party (Martin & Chaudhary, 1983). Therefore, balance and neutrality are not goals. Inevitably, their coverage of election campaigns is biased in favor of the government and the ruling party.

Based upon Shoemaker and Reese's theory of news content, it is reasonable to assume that Taiwan's private cable television channels should be more balanced in their coverage of the election campaign than were the state-owned broadcast television stations.

Political Balance and Election Studies

One of the continuing concerns of mass media researchers with election news is whether the election is covered in an unbiased and balanced manner. In a democracy, news is the main source of election information (Robinson & Levy, 1986). Election news must be fair and balanced towards candidates and parties in order to provide complete and unbiased information to facilitate voter decisions. Therefore, fairness and balance are the basic requirements that election news reporting must fulfill, while political bias is a violation of journalistic ethics (Josley, 1984).

In election news reporting, balance refers to impartiality and equal or proportional representation of parties or candidates (McQuail, 1992). In most election studies, balance has been assessed in terms of amount of coverage devoted to different parties and candidates (Johnson, 1993; Stempel & Windhauser, 1984, 1989), soundbites spoken by candidates (King, 1995; Lowry & Shidler, 1995), and principal news sources used (Lo & Chung, 1992; Lo, 1994). Balance was also determined according to how favorably various parties and candidates were portrayed in the news (Hofstetter, 1976; Joslyn, 1984; Kenney & Simpson, 1993; Lo & Chung, 1992; McQuail, 1992).

In this study, balance is assessed in terms of amount of coverage devoted to different parties and candidates, principal news sources used, and the portrayal of various parties and candidates. Merely assessing amount of coverage devoted to different parties and candidates and the principal news sources used is inadequate, because some parties and candidates may be portrayed more favorably than others.

In the United States and in the United Kingdom, the major television news networks in general abide by the principle of fairness in their coverage of political par-

ties and candidates. There is no evident political bias (Semetko, 1996).

Broadcasting executives in the United Kingdom negotiate with various political parties before election campaigns to allocate the amount of coverage for each party during the election. The two networks in the UK, BBC and ITN, have adopted a "stopwatching" policy regarding election coverage to ensure that the actual allocation of time to each party coincides with the terms set forth in the negotiation. Though ITN officially suspended the use of "stopwatching" during the 1992 general election, its coverage of various competing parties was overall rather balanced (Semetko, 1996).

Though the major television networks in the United States do not adopt a stop-watching policy, it is a widely accepted ethical guideline among television journalists that presidential election coverage should be balanced in its treatment of different political parties and candidates (Semetko, 1996). The three major American television networks have, by and large, given equal treatment to candidates from both Democratic and Republican parties during the previous presidential elections. But third-party candidates have received less coverage than their Republican or Democratic counterparts (Joslyn, 1984; Stovall, 1985).

Although this general finding of balanced coverage of major-party presidential candidates may be prevalent among the major television networks in the United Kingdom and the United States, it is not always true of networks in other countries. Past research conducted in Taiwan indicated that election news coverage was biased heavily in favor of the ruling party (Lo & Chung, 1992). Discernible political bias exists in both print and electronic media coverage, though fairness and balance are professed to be the basic rule governing journalistic practice (Code of Television Ethics, ROC, 1974; Wang, 1995).

In a content analysis of four newspapers during the 1977 local Magisterial Election, Kuo (1978) found that the four papers in Taiwan were extremely unbalanced in the amount of coverage given the two candidates. Of the 82 stories about the two candidates, 57 (69.5%) dealt with the KMT candidate, 24 (29.3%) were mixed or covered both candidates, and only one story (1.2%) covered the opposition candidate exclusively.

This extremely unbalanced election coverage pattern improved significantly during the 1980s. For example, Wu (1982) studied the 1980 Legislative Election coverage in three newspapers and found KMT candidates received 62.5% of the coverage, while opposition candidates received 37.5%. Lay, Chen, and Chen (1985) analyzed campaign coverage of the 1983 Legislative Election in six newspapers and found that although the KMT candidates were still dominant subjects of election news, other candidates also received considerable amount of coverage. Their research discovered that 66.3% of the coverage went to the KMT candidates, while other candidates received 33.7%.

In a recent study of election news coverage, Chen and Chen (1990) also found that although the KMT candidates received more favorable coverage, election coverage in general had become more balanced during the 1980s. They examined the campaign coverage of the 1989 Legislative Election in seven newspapers and found that KMT candidates received 47.7% of the coverage, while DPP candidates garnered 32.4%, and other candidates received 19.9%.

In a study of television coverage of the 1989 Legislative Election, Peng (1991) found that all three broadcast television stations gave the KMT candidates more coverage than they gave other candidates. Lo (1994) compared state-owned and private news media coverage of the 1991 National Assembly Election and found that the state newspapers and television stations differed markedly from the private newspapers, both in their coverage of the election campaign and in their portrayal of the candidates. State-owned newspapers and television stations were far more likely than private newspapers to use KMT officials as news sources and to contain more news favorable to KMT.

In the most recent study of television election coverage, King (1996) found that the three broadcast television stations aired considerably more soundbites from ruling party officials. As a result, KMT party officials had far more opportunities to directly express themselves in the television news than did opposition leaders during the 1992 Legislative Election.

An examination of previous studies shows that most of the past research has focused on the amount of coverage given candidates and the favorableness of the portrayal of different candidates. Few studies have attempted to assess the effects of news media ownership on the election news coverage (Kenney & Simpson, 1993). This study was designed to fill the gap in the election news coverage literature and help show that media ownership is an important factor influencing news coverage of the election campaign in Taiwan.

Hypotheses

Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H₁: The state-owned television stations will give greater coverage to KMT and its candidates and a smaller amount of coverage to opposition parties and their candidates than will privately owned cable television channels.

H₂: The state-owned television stations will use more KMT officials and fewer opposition party officials as news sources than will privately owned cable television channels.

H₃: The state-owned television stations will contain more favorable news about KMT and its candidates and less favorable news about the opposition parties and their candidates than will privately owned cable television channels.

Method

This study is based on a content analysis of the evening newscasts of six news outlets—the three state-owned broadcast television stations and three privately owned cable television channels. The three state-owned television stations are TTV,

CTV, and CTS. The three cable television channels are Truth News Network (TNN), Chinese Television Network (CTN), and Television Broadcast Satellite Service (TVBS). TNN, Taiwan's first all-news cable channel, began broadcasting on March 1, 1994. CTN is a 24-hour satellite-delivered news channel owned by Hong Kong's CIM Ltd. and AIM Media Ltd. TVBS, the most successful satellite-delivered cable channel, is a joint venture between Hong Kong's Television Broadcast Ltd. and Taiwan's largest film distributor, ERA Co. (Nazzaro, 1996). The three cable channels were chosen for this study because their news programs had the highest viewing rates among the cable channels during the 1995 Legislative campaign (Chen, 1996).

Election news stories chosen for analysis appeared in these six news outlets for the entire period of the election campaign from November 21, 1995 (official campaign day) to December 2, 1995 (one day before the election).

Each story was coded to indicate its length, news time received by each party and its candidates, principal spokespersons, and whether it reflected favorably, neutrally, or unfavorably on each party and its candidates. Stories were coded into the following categories:

News time received: News stories that dealt with each political party and its candidates were measured in seconds and coded.

Principal source: Stories that originated from political party or campaign officials were classified in terms of their principal spokespersons. Categories included KMT officials, DPP officials, NP officials, and other party or campaign officials.

Political candidate: News stories that dealt with political candidates were classified as KMT, DPP, NP, other party candidates, or mixed.

Political party: News stories dealing with political parties were classified as KMT, DPP, NP, other parties, or mixed.

Favorableness: After reviewing the entire story, coders evaluated whether the general image of different parties and candidates was favorable, unfavorable, neutral, or inapplicable. A story was considered favorable if positive values—for instance, success, honesty, optimism, and such—were associated with the party or its candidates. A story was considered unfavorable if negative values, including failure, corruption, pessimism, and so on, were associated with a party or its candidates. For example, a story was coded as favorable to DPP and its candidates because it portrayed a DPP candidate in front of a friendly audience and included statements of confidence that he and DPP would win the election. Another story was coded as unfavorable to KMT and its candidates because it reported a vote-buying scandal involving KMT candidates. The category labelled as neutral refers to news which only reported neutral facts or contained about the same amount of favorable and unfavorable coverage; coders chose this category when they felt they could not make a clear judgment regarding favorableness. The last category refers to news unrelated to any candidate.²

Only election news stories were coded. Eight students in journalism and communication at the National Chengchi University were trained to serve as coders. A test of inter-coder reliability (Holsti, 1969) was performed by using 10 randomly chosen news stories. Inter-coder agreements were news time received (.76); principal source (.73); political candidates (.93); political party (.79); and favorableness (.82).

Results

The first hypothesis predicted that state-owned television stations would give greater amount of coverage to KMT and its candidates and smaller amount of coverage to the opposition parties and their candidates than would privately owned cable television channels. As indicated in Table 1, this hypothesis was supported.

Table 1
Amount of Coverage Received During the
1995 Legislative Election

1. News time received

Political party and candidate	Broadcast TV		Cable TV		Total	
	seconds	%	seconds	%	seconds	%
KMT	14,362	63.0	13,997	43.4	28,358	51.5
DPP	3,843	16.8	9,401	29.2	13,243	24.1
NP	2,939	12.9	6,040	18.7	8,980	16.3
Others	1,667	7.3	2,785	8.6	4,452	8.1
Total	22,811	100.0	32,223	99.9	55,034	100.0

$X^2 = 2148.8$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$. Coefficient of contingency = .19.

2. Stories about candidates

KMT	81	34.6	53	27.5	134	31.4
DPP	15	6.4	32	16.6	47	11.0
NP	19	8.1	22	11.4	41	9.4
Others	16	6.8	15	7.8	31	7.3
Mixed	103	44.0	71	36.8	174	40.8
Total	234	99.9	193	100.1	427	99.9

$X^2 = 14.5$; $df = 4$; $p < .01$. Coefficient of contingency = .18.

3. Stories about political parties

KMT	115	40.8	109	39.9	224	40.4
DPP	15	5.3	55	20.2	70	12.6
NP	19	6.7	33	12.1	52	9.4
Others	12	4.2	8	2.9	20	3.6
Mixed	121	42.9	68	24.9	189	34.1
Total	282	99.9	273	100.0	555	100.1

$X^2 = 42.3$; $df = 4$; $p < .001$. Coefficient of contingency = .27.

Of the total amount of news time allotted to political parties and their candidates, the state-owned television stations gave 63% to KMT and its candidates, 16.8% to DPP and its candidates, 12.9% to NP and its candidates, and 7.3% to other parties and their candidates. In the privately owned cable television channels, 43.4% of the total news time on political parties and their candidates went to KMT and its candidates, 29.2% went to DPP and its candidates, 18.7% went to NP and its candidates, and 8.6% went to other parties and their candidates ($X^2 = 2148.8$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$).

Of the election stories about political parties, the state-owned television stations carried 115 (40.8%) KMT stories, 15 (5.3%) DPP stories, 19 (6.7%) NP stories, and 12 (4.2%) other parties' stories, with 121 (or 42.9%) of the stories mixed. In the privately owned cable television channels, 109 (39.9%) of the stories about political parties featured the KMT, 55 (20.2%) the DPP, 33 (12.1%) the NP, 8 (2.9%) other parties, and 68 (24.9%) were mixed ($X^2 = 42.3$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$).

Of the stories about candidates, the state-owned television stations allotted 81 (34.6%) stories to KMT candidates, 15 (6.4%) to DPP candidates, 19 (8.1%) to NP candidates, and 16 to other parties' candidates. Forty-four percent of the stories were mixed. In the privately owned cable television channels, 53 (27.5%) stories concerned KMT candidates, 32 (16.6%) featured DPP candidates, 22 (11.4%) highlighted NP candidates, 15 (7.8%) went to other parties' candidates, and 71 (36.8%) stories were mixed ($X^2 = 14.5$, $df = 4$, $p < .01$).

The second hypothesis predicted that state-owned television stations would use more KMT officials and fewer opposition party officials as news sources. As shown in Table 2, this hypothesis was supported. The state-owned television stations used many more KMT officials as news sources than did the privately owned cable television channels.

Table 2
Principal News Sources Used During the
1995 Legislative Election

Parties	Broadcast TV		Cable TV		Total	
	freq.	%	freq.	%	freq.	%
KMT	153	68.9	119	44.4	272	55.5
DPP	31	14.0	81	30.2	112	22.9
NP	18	8.1	38	14.2	56	11.4
Others	20	9.1	30	11.2	50	10.2
Total	222	100.1	268	100.0	490	100.0

$X^2 = 31.8$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$. Coefficient of contingency = .25.

The state-owned television stations ran a total of 222 election stories in which news sources were identifiable. Of these, 153 (68.9%) used KMT officials as principal spokespersons, 31 (14%) used DPP officials, 18 (8.1%) used NP officials, and 20 (9.1%) used campaign or other parties' officials.

The privately owned cable television stations ran 268 election stories in which news sources were identifiable. Of these, 119 (44.4%) used KMT officials as principal spokespersons, 81 (30.2%) used DPP officials, 38 (14.2%) used NP officials, and 30 (11.2%) used campaign or other parties' officials ($X^2 = 31.8$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$).

The third hypothesis predicted that the state-owned television stations would contain a higher proportion of favorable news about KMT and its candidates than would privately owned cable television channels. This hypothesis was also supported (see Table 3).

Table 3
Portrayal of Political Candidates and Parties
During the 1995 Legislative Election

1. Portrayal of political candidates

KMT candidates	Broadcast TV		Cable TV		Total	
	freq.	%	freq.	%	freq.	%
Favorable	50	61.7	18	34.0	68	50.7
Neutral	12	14.8	9	17.0	21	15.7
Unfavorable	19	23.5	26	49.1	45	33.6
Total	81	100.0	53	100.1	134	100.0

$X^2 = 11.2$; $df = 2$; $p < .01$. Coefficient of contingency = .28.

DPP candidates

Favorable	5	33.3	21	65.6	26	55.3
Neutral	7	46.7	9	28.1	16	34.0
Unfavorable	3	20.0	2	6.3	5	10.6
Total	15	100.0	32	100.1	47	99.9

$X^2 = 4.7$; $df = 2$; $p > .05$. Coefficient of contingency = .30.

NP candidates

Favorable	5	26.3	12	57.1	17	42.5
Neutral	9	47.4	6	28.6	15	37.5
Unfavorable	5	26.3	3	14.3	8	20.0
Total	19	100.0	21	100.0	40	100.0

$X^2 = 4.0$; $df = 2$; $p > .05$. Coefficient of contingency = .30.

2. Portrayal of political parties

KMT

Favorable	103	43.1	44	19.5	147	31.6
Neutral	87	36.4	93	41.2	180	38.7
Unfavorable	49	20.5	89	39.4	138	29.7
Total	239	100.0	226	100.1	465	100.0

$X^2 = 34.9$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$. Coefficient of contingency = .26.

Table 3 (continued)

Portrayal of Political Parties

DPP	Broadcast TV		Cable TV		Total	
	freq.	%	freq.	%	freq.	%
Favorable	36	24.8	50	32.1	86	28.6
Neutral	86	59.3	79	50.6	165	54.8
Unfavorable	23	15.9	27	17.3	50	16.6
Total	145	100.0	156	100.0	301	100.0

$X^2 = 2.5$; $df = 2$; $p > .05$. Coefficient of contingency = .09.

NP

Favorable	24	19.2	48	35.3	72	27.6
Neutral	82	65.6	67	49.3	149	57.1
Unfavorable	19	15.2	21	15.4	40	15.3
Total	125	100.0	136	100.0	261	100.0

$X^2 = 9.1$; $df = 2$; $p < .05$. Coefficient of contingency = .18.

Of the stories about KMT, the state-owned television stations ran 103 (43.1%) stories favorable to KMT, 49 (20.5%) unfavorable, and 87 (36.4%) neutral. The privately owned cable television channels ran 44 (19.5%) stories favorable to KMT, 89 (39.4%) unfavorable, and 93 (41.2%) neutral ($X^2 = 34.9$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$). Of the stories about DPP, the state-owned television stations ran 36 (24.8%) stories favorable to DPP, 23 (15.9%) unfavorable, and 86 (59.3%) neutral. The privately owned cable television channels ran 50 (32.1%) stories favorable to DPP, 27 (17.3%) unfavorable, and 79 (50.6%) neutral ($X^2 = 2.5$, $df = 2$, n.s.). Of the stories about NP, the state-owned television stations ran 24 (19.2%) stories favorable to NP, 19 (15.2%) unfavorable, and 82 (65.6%) neutral. The privately owned cable television channels ran 48 (35.3%) favorable to NP, 21 (15.4%) unfavorable, and 67 (49.3%) neutral ($X^2 = 9.1$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$).

Of the stories about KMT candidates, the state-owned television stations ran 50 (61.7%) stories favorable to KMT candidates, 19 (23.5%) unfavorable, and 12 (14.8%) neutral. The privately owned cable television channels ran 18 (34%) stories favorable to KMT candidates, 26 (49.1%) unfavorable, and 9 (17%) neutral ($X^2 = 11.2$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$). Of the stories about DPP candidates, the state-owned television stations ran 5 (33.3%) stories favorable to DPP candidates, 3 (20%) unfavorable, and 7 (46.7%) neutral. The privately owned cable television channels ran 21 (65.6%) stories favorable to DPP candidates, 2 (6.3%) unfavorable, and 9 (28.1%) neutral ($X^2 = 4.7$, $df = 2$, n. s.). Of the stories about NP candidates, the state-owned television stations ran 5 (26.3%) stories favorable to NP candidates, 5 (26.3%) unfavorable, and 9 (47.4%) neutral. The privately owned cable television channels ran 12 (57.1%) stories favorable to NP candidates, 3 (14.3%) unfavorable, and 6 (28.6%) neutral ($X^2 = 4.0$, $df = 2$, n.s.).

As anticipated, the state-owned television stations contained a higher proportion of favorable news about KMT and its candidates than did the privately owned cable television channels. The privately owned cable television channels contained a higher proportion of favorable news about the opposition parties and their candidates. However, most of the differences between portrayals of the opposition parties and their candidates were not statistically significant.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to compare how the state-owned broadcast television stations and the privately owned cable television channels reported the campaign, the parties, and the candidates during the 1995 Legislative election in Taiwan.

As anticipated, the state-owned television stations proved to be far more likely than the privately owned cable television channels to give greater coverage to KMT and its candidates, use KMT officials as spokespersons, and contain more news coverage favorable to KMT than to other parties.

The privately owned cable television channels differed sharply from the state-owned broadcast stations, both in their coverage of the election campaign and in their portrayal of the candidates. The privately owned cable television channels were more likely than the state-owned television stations to allot more coverage to the opposition parties and their candidates and to use DPP and NP officials as news sources. In addition, they also portrayed the DPP and NP more favorably than the KMT.

It is hardly surprising that the privately owned cable television channels were more balanced in their coverage of the election campaign, because they were providing programming to build audience share rather than endorsing a particular candidate or party. Criticizing the KMT was necessary to balance the lop-sided presentations of the KMT-backed stations.

Cable television ownership patterns are so new as to have evaded serious study, but in general they appear to be mainly joint ventures by entrepreneurs rather than by political elements seeking control or influence. Therefore, cable television channels were relatively resistant to the influence of political parties and the government and hence able to report sensitive political events including the Legislative election with greater fairness and balance.

In contrast, election news on the state-owned broadcast television stations was heavily biased in favor of the KMT and its candidates. From top to bottom, the state-owned broadcast television stations were staffed with pro-government and pro-KMT officials. In many cases station officials concurrently wore KMT hats or were retired politicians. Journalists themselves were likely to be KMT members.

Under direct and indirect control of the government and the ruling KMT, the three broadcast television stations were closely scrutinized to ensure that their news policies were in line with the government/party policies and their election coverage supported the KMT and its candidates. Consequently, partisan bias is inevitably encountered in their election news coverage.

Two events illustrate the difference in election news coverage between the state-owned broadcast television stations and the privately owned cable television channels:

Several suspects were arrested on November 27 for allegedly buying votes for KMT candidates. The three privately owned cable television channels gave extensive coverage to the vote-buying incident. TVBS, for example, used the item as the lead story and devoted 358 seconds to it. In sharp contrast, the three state-owned television stations, with the notable exception of TTV, did not mention the incident at all. TTV devoted 66 seconds to coverage of the vote-buying incident.

Another example came on December 1, two days before the election. Most candidates took to the streets to solicit support from voters as part of last-minute efforts. The three state-owned television stations gave extensive coverage to the campaigning. However, in each case, KMT candidates were highlighted and opposition candidates were shown only fleetingly. The three privately owned cable television channels gave balanced coverage, providing equal time to KMT and opposition candidates.

It is obvious that the KMT still dominates the three broadcast television stations. However, the growth of cable television and the drastic changes in the political and social structure in Taiwan have forced the three state-owned television stations to make observable changes in their election coverage strategies. Compared to their previous election coverage (Lo, 1994), the three state-owned stations had become much more balanced in their coverage of the 1995 Legislative Election. Their coverage contained a certain amount of news unfavorable to the KMT, including the vote-buying scandal of KMT candidates and opposition criticism of the KMT chairman, President Lee Teng-hui. Their reporting also contained some news favorable to the opposition parties. These indicators provide clear signs of decreasing ideological control by the government.

Furthermore, the government awarded a fourth broadcast television license in 1995 to All People Station, owned by DPP members. Although the government announced it would also issue a fifth broadcast television license and six to 10 regional licenses in 1996 (Nazzaro, 1996), Hong Chong-jan, director of the Department of Radio and Television Affairs at the Government Information Office, said that the government decided not to issue additional television licenses because cable television has substantially enlarged the scope of programs available (personal communication, December 16, 1997).

It is apparent that new technology, market forces, and the free and open political atmosphere have forced the government to relax its stringent control of broadcast television. State-owned television stations have been encouraged by the same forces to become more liberal and to adopt more independent journalistic approaches in election coverage.

The phenomenon of cable television in Taiwan has earned public and—at first reluctantly—government attention and acceptance. In the process, as this study shows, it has contributed to the achievement of more balanced coverage more quickly than might have been predicted through slow liberalization of government-controlled media.

Under such sociopolitical conditions, there are ample targets for future study. Very rapid structural changes in Taiwan's television market demand continuing studies of increasing sophistication. The fact that a broadcast license has been awarded to the opposition DPP also suggests future study of how that party and its station

behave. Future studies need to examine the impact of different ownership on other types of news content such as the news beamed to Taiwan directly from China (Taiwan's political arch-enemy) and from Hong Kong, now under Chinese control.

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Notes

¹Taiwan's Cable Television Law makes a distinction between cable system operators, those responsible for cable installation and signal distribution, and channel operators, who provide the programming distributed by cable system operators. Under the cable law, five system operators are allowed to compete in each of the fifty cable districts across Taiwan. Currently, eight main channel operators provide about 70 channels.

²Our operational definition of favorableness comes from Hofstetter, 1976.