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The Non-Consensus 1992 Consensus

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Abstract

The 1992 Consensus is perhaps the most crucial political term for cross-Strait relations. Surveys show that the public consistently supports it in Taiwan. Despite the alleged broad support, there has not been an academic study examining if Taiwanese people understand the content of the 1992 Consensus. Such an inquiry is important as the administration in Taiwan has yet accepted the Consensus in its interactions with Beijing. A nearly representative online survey was conducted in July 2018, and 1001 Taiwanese respondents were recruited to choose among different ‘definitions’ of the 1992 Consensus. Results show that only one-third of the respondents chose the version that Kuomintang agreed on, while another one-third misperceived the 1992 Consensus as a country-to-country agreement. Taiwanese people might have supported the Consensus for content that it is not. We then discuss the policy implications of our study for both China and Taiwan and provide future research orientations.

Keywords: China Politics, Cross-Strait Relationship, 1992 Consensus, Political Knowledge, Taiwan Politics

Bio

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Introduction

Cross-Strait relations have long been a thorny issue not only for both sides of the Strait but also for the United States since the stability of cross-Strait relations has long been their national interest (Nathan, 2010; Yeh and Wu, 2020). In Taiwan, the democratization began in the late 1980s presents a puzzle to the status quo in the Strait, as the pro-unification party, *Kuomintang* (KMT hereafter), lost its ruling power to the pro-independence party, *Democratic Progressive Party* (DPP hereafter) between 2000 and 2008, and from 2016 to present. On the one hand, KMT and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are certainly more comfortable recognizing the name of 'China,' and perhaps pursuing an eventual reunification between these two Chinas. On the other hand, DPP leaders consider such ideas to be anathematic. In fact, DPP has consistently refused to abide by a historical understanding that entails the notion of 'two Chinas,' namely *the 1992 Consensus*.

The 1992 Consensus is a crucial concept to understanding cross-Strait relations.¹ To the KMT, it provides the foundation for both sides to maintain interactions and socio-economic exchanges. To date, both KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP hereafter) still regard the Consensus as the guiding principle of cross-Strait relations. However, since the sitting President of Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen, took power in 2016, she has repeatedly and publicly denied the existence of such a concept, playing it down to a simple historical fact that occurred in a meeting between both sides in 1992. Tsai's refusal to accept and abide by the 1992 Consensus angers Beijing, who

¹ A synopsis of the 1992 Consensus: In the 1992 meeting in Hong Kong, one of the main focuses was the definition of 'One China,' which includes the official stances on the adversarial sides. Both sides could not reach a resolution but managed to temporarily put aside contentious issues at the time by 'agree to disagree.' Later in the early 2000s, Su Chi, former Head of the National Security Council in the Ma Ying-jeou administration, articulated the term, 1992 Consensus, and it had become a central pillar in maintaining the stability of cross-Strait relations since 2008. For Beijing, the 1992 Consensus means 'both parties agree on the one China principle;' for the KMT government in Taiwan, it means 'One China with respective interpretations.' (Lee, 2019)

retaliates by taking a series of aggressive actions toward Taiwan, including limiting the number of Mainland tourists to visit Taiwan, poaching Taiwan's diplomatic allies, and employing various means to sabotage any official recognitions of Taiwan in the international arena. To dial down tensions across the Strait, many have called and even urged the Tsai administration to recognize the 1992 Consensus, as previous KMT predecessors did.

Although many have hailed the importance of the Consensus and argued that the public continuously favors it in Taiwan,² one important question remained unanswered: do the citizens in Taiwan have a clear understanding of the content of the Consensus? Some citizens in Taiwan might know that the 1992 Consensus means 'One China with respective interpretations' as defined by previous Taiwanese administrations, but the CCP has a different interpretation. Since the content of the Consensus is myriad with complexities and ambiguities, we wonder if citizens could grasp such a complicated term. Moreover, the current administration in Taiwan has not referred to the Consensus for many years, which might further alienate the public from this term.

In fact, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that many Taiwanese do not have a clear understanding of the Consensus. A representative survey conducted by Academia Sinica in 2016 showed that, although 89.6% of Taiwanese people have heard of the 1992 Consensus, only 24.9% reported that they understood the term (Chang, 2016). To further assess the public's understanding of the various interpretations of the Consensus, we conducted an original survey in Taiwan to answer this question. This survey is timely as there have been studies showing how one thinks

² For example, the Taiwan National Security Survey (TNSS), a nationally representative survey sponsored by Duke University and conducted by National Chengchi University, shows that, since 2008, there have always been over 50% of Taiwanese people agreed with the statement that 'the Taiwanese government should use "One China with different interpretations" to deal with China.' In the most recent wave of the TNSS conducted on Jan 1-3, 2019, around 60.6% of respondents supported the "One China with different interpretations".

about the Consensus that could influence their political behaviors in Taiwan (e.g., Schubert, 2012; Meng, 2014).

Between July 6-9, 2018, an online survey with 1001 respondents was fielded in Taiwan by the PollcracyLab housed at National Chengchi University in Taipei, Taiwan. We asked the respondents to choose from four different options/interpretations of the 1992 Consensus. Our findings suggested that the Taiwanese did not hold a unified view of the 1992 Consensus. In the survey, only about a third (34.1%) of the respondents chose the interpretation that the Consensus means that ‘ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland. Two governments belong to the same country, which was not unified yet’ (the ‘correct response’ as defined by the KMT position). Most citizens in Taiwan, however, had different understandings. Their answers ranged from ROC and PRC are separate countries (33.4%), ROC is a local government of the PRC (4.9%), to ROC and PRC each represent the whole China—Taiwan, and Mainland combined (16.6%). In short, the 1992 Consensus is not much of a consensus among the Taiwanese public. When asked which version of the Consensus a citizen would like to support, most (75.1%) endorsed the view that PRC and ROC are two different countries. Ironically, this might be the exact statement (cross-strait as country-to-country relations) that founders of the Consensus tried to prevent in the first place.

We believe that our findings will help both the academia and think tanks in the United States, Taiwan, and China formulate policy suggestions that correspond to the reality of the citizens’ political preferences in Taiwan. Exploring how Taiwanese people define the 1992 Consensus provides essential insights and a foundation for future analyses of the US-China-Taiwan relationship. In the next section, we review the development of the Consensus before

exposing the gap between this political term and public understanding. We then moved on to our research design and results and conclude with policy suggestions and future research venues.

The Changing Definitions of the 1992 Consensus

The 1992 Consensus was based on an understanding in a meeting between two second-track organizations: Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) in Hong Kong in October 1992. The understanding reached at that time in the meeting is that both sides will adhere to the one-China principle, but each side reserves the right to interpret the content of 'one China. A Taiwanese political scientist, Su Chi, later coined the consensus of the meeting as the '1992 Consensus.' Since then, the 1992 Consensus has been the working principle for both sides of the Strait. From China's viewpoint, it has been consistent that the Consensus is analogous to the one-China principle—PRC represents the only legitimate China, and Taiwan belongs to China. On the other hand, the Consensus has morphed on the Taiwan side to indicate that 'one China' refers to the 'Republic of China' and 'the other China' is the 'People's Republic of China.'

Over the years, the joint understanding has generated much debate among political elites in Taiwan. For example, former President of Taiwan, Chen Shui-bian's acceptance of the term was quickly rescinded by the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) minister, Tsai Ing-wen (now the President of ROC), the next day. Tsai clarified that the understanding is that each side would respectively interpret one China (*gebiao yizhong*), rather than 'one China with different interpretations' (*yizhong gebiao*). The primary reason was that DPP is opposed to the idea of accepting the one-China principle in favor of Taiwan's sovereignty in its relations with China. The

wording rearrangement signifies a different concentration and priority (Lee, 2019). To this day, Tsai has not changed her stance on this issue.

Contrary to Tsai's disregard for the consensus, Ma Ying-Jeou (President of ROC, 2008-2016) came into the office promising that Taiwan would conduct its relations with China based on the interpretation of 'one China with respective interpretations.' Ma's acceptance of the Consensus had public support. A poll conducted by National Chengchi University for the Mainland Affairs Council in December 2012 revealed that most of the public (56%) identified with the government's position on the '1992 Consensus,' and approved (54%) the government's approach to promoting institutionalized cross-Strait negotiations on the foundation of the Consensus.³ Surveys from the following years yielded similar results. Ma's acceptance of the Consensus ushered in an era of rapprochement across the Strait and successfully reduced cross-Strait tensions during Chen's presidency.

The recognition of the Consensus, however, led Ma administration to face skepticism from the public that he was 'selling out' Taiwan and was preparing for both sides' unification. The emergence of social protests, most notably the Sunflower Movement (Ho, 2015; Wu, 2019), dealt a severe blow to Ma's reputation as authorities violently cracked down on the protestors. As the prospects of unification increased among the public in Taiwan, many started to turn their support to DPP for maintaining the island's autonomy.

During her campaign for the presidency, DPP's candidate, Tsai Ing-wen, was being pressed by both Beijing and KMT competitors for her position on the Consensus. Tsai never made a clear remark on her stance on the Consensus. Instead, she claimed that she would 'push for the peaceful and stable development of cross-Strait relations in accordance with the will of the Taiwanese

³ For more information about the survey, consult <http://www.mac.gov.tw/public/Data/2122614261071.pdf>

people and the existing ROC constitutional order’ and that the ‘accumulated outcomes of more than twenty years of negotiations and exchanges...will serve as the firm basis of my efforts to further the peaceful and stable development of cross-Strait relations.’⁴

In December 2015, for the first time, Tsai clearly expressed her stance on the Consensus. In a presidential debate, she commented that ‘the 1992 Consensus is an option, but not the only option.’⁵ Fearing that her remark would be interpreted as caving in to Chinese pressure, Tsai later clarified that the most important conclusion of the meeting in 1992 was to reach mutual understandings, seek commonalities, and shelve differences to allow cross-Strait relations to move forward. Tsai’s continuing refusal to acknowledge the one-China principle of the 1992 Consensus leaves many worries that she would jeopardize cross-Strait relations.

Similar to Ma, Tsai’s reluctance to change her stance is rooted in public opinion and a gradual change in citizen’s national identity. According to surveys by the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University,⁶ in 1992, only a small percentage of respondents (around 18 %) self-identified as ‘Taiwanese,’ in comparison to 25.5% who identified as ‘Chinese.’ Another 46.4% identified themselves as ‘both Taiwanese and Chinese.’ Before Tsai was elected in 2016, the percentage of respondents who considered themselves as ‘Taiwanese’ has grown tremendously to 58.2%, in comparison with a meager 3.4% who thought of themselves as ‘Chinese.’ The percentage of citizens who reported themselves as ‘both Taiwanese and Chinese’ also reduced to 36.3%. The drastic changes in Taiwan’s identity are an important reason for Tsai to refrain from

⁴ Tsai Ing-wen, ‘Taiwan meeting the challenges, drafting a model of new Asian value,’ Speech to CSIS, June 3, 2015. The authoritative English version, along with section-by-section translation into Chinese, is available on the DPP website at <http://www.dpp.org.tw/>.

⁵ ‘Full text of presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen at the first televised debate, third phase, interactive questions’, Light up Taiwan blog, December 27, 2015, <http://iing.tw/posts/465>.

⁶ See “Taiwanese Core Political Attitude Trend (1992-2020/06)” at: <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/course/news.php?Sn=166>. Accessed: Sep 28th 2020. The survey does not specify the exact date of execution of the poll in each year. However, in recent years the survey is often conducted in each January and June. The sample size and methodology are included in the online document.

accepting the Consensus based on the ‘one China’ principle, which emphasizes that Taiwan belongs to ‘China.’

Although the trend of a growing Taiwanese identity may lead to a reduction in the support for the one-China principle and the 1992 Consensus, polls on attitudes toward the Consensus reveal a different story. For example, a poll conducted shortly after Tsai began her tenure showed that about 40% of respondents said Tsai should recognize the Consensus (Taipei Times, 2016). Similarly, the Taiwan National Security Survey (TNSS) constantly shows that the public views the Consensus as the basis for cross-Strait relations. In 2017, nearly 60% of respondents supported such a viewpoint.

How do we explain the disconnections between support for Taiwanese identity and the 1992 Consensus? Existing literature on the 1992 Consensus (Schubert, 2004; Wang et al., 2001; Wei, 2016) has not shed light on this issue for two reasons. First, most of these studies focus on how leaders react to the Consensus and how it affects cross-Strait relations without studying the public’s understanding and perception of the Consensus. Second, a sharp disconnection, as we have established here, largely did not exist until recent years, as more citizens have self-identified as ‘Chinese’ or ‘both Chinese and Taiwanese’ for the past several years. This is thus a new phenomenon that the literature has not accounted for.

We argue that the emergence of this new phenomenon might be attributed to the fact that, although the public is aware of the Consensus, they are unclear of what it entails. In other words, the public might be supporting a consensus but do not know the details of it. A survey conducted by Academia Sinica in 2016 showed that 89.6% of Taiwanese people did have heard of the 1992 Consensus, but only 24.9% reported that they knew the content of the term (Chang, 2018). In the

next section, we describe how we employ a survey experiment to find answers to our research question.

Research Design

Four Versions of the 1992 Consensus

Based on the discussion above, we categorize the different interpretations of the 1992 Consensus into four groups. To be precise, we ask the respondents this question (in Mandarin Chinese in the survey, translated below by the authors):

Q.19 When it comes to the 1992 Consensus, different people have different says on what it is. Which description below is closer to your understanding of the 1992 Consensus?

- (1) On international affairs, both ROC and PRC claim to represent the whole Chinese people including both Mainland and Taiwan.*
- (2) ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland, the two governments belong to the same country waiting for unification.*
- (3) ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland, the two governments belong to two different countries.*
- (4) PRC represents the whole Chinese people including both Mainland and Taiwan, and ROC is the local government.*

Q19 關於『九二共識』，許多人對於這個重要的政策主張有不同的說法。請問下列哪一個敘述比較接近您所知道的『九二共識』？

- (1) 中華民國政府與中華人民共和國政府各自在國際上宣稱代表兩岸全部的範圍與人民。
- (2) 中華民國政府在國際上僅代表台灣地區，中華人民共和國政府僅代表大陸地區，兩個政府是同一個國家內尚未統一的兩部分。

- (3) 中華民國政府在國際上僅代表台灣地區，中華人民共和國政府僅代表大陸地區，兩個政府代表兩個不同的國家。
- (4) 中華人民共和國政府代表兩岸全部的範圍與人民，中華民國政府是其下轄的地方政府。

Among the four options, (1) is close to the official stances of both sides during the Cold War era. According to this interpretation, both ROC and PRC insist that it represents the whole China, including both Mainland China and Taiwan. The status can be traced back to 1949 when KMT was defeated in the civil war and retreated to Taiwan. Ever since then, the ROC and PRC governments had been competing for representing the legitimate China.

Option (2) is the definition proposed by KMT chairman Lien Chan based on the mutually agreed principle ‘I respect your sovereignty; you respect my sovereignty’ (Schubert, 2004). Since Taiwan’s democratization begins, ROC gradually accepts that another political entity rules the Mainland, and taking the Mainland back is not a feasible option anymore. In 1992, the National Unification Council, an advisory institution of ROC in charge of the reunification affairs, stated that ‘it is an objective fact that China became temporarily divided by two political entities in each side of the Strait since 1949.’ (Ho, 1992) Although the PRC did not agree to such an interpretation initially, it gradually came on board as it realizes that international isolation only strengthens Taiwan’s independence movement (Wang et al., 2011). Although PRC tries to move away from this position under Xi Jinping’s ruling, overall, we contend that Option (2) is closest to the ‘real’ working definition of the Consensus made agreed upon by KMT and CCP.

Next, option (4) represents PRC’s One China Principle (Xu 2011), which was repeatedly emphasized by Xi Jinping in his speech in the 19th Party Congress in 2017. The major difference between options (1) and (4) comes down to how ROC defines its role in cross-Strait relations and how PRC reacts to ROC’s positions. In (1), PRC and ROC reach a consensus that both sides claim

that it represents the whole China. In (4), PRC and ROC reach a consensus that PRC represents the whole China, whereas ROC is just a local government.

Last, option (3) is a trick question. Even though PRC may acknowledge ROC's sovereignty on Taiwan, to this day, PRC has never agreed to any consensus that claims PRC and ROC are two different countries. In fact, this position irritates PRC greatly. In 1999, Chinese media berated ROC President Lee Teng-hui after suggesting that cross-Strait relations can be seen as a special country-to-country relationship (Wei, 2015). The option is now even more far-fetched considering Xi's tougher stance on Taiwan.

We believe that the trick option should be included for several reasons. First, in both TNSS 2016 and 2017, over 66% of Taiwanese people agreed with the argument that 'Taiwan is already an independent country, and its name is the Republic of China.' Therefore, many Taiwanese may mistakenly believe that the consensus means that 'PRC accepted ROC as an independent country.'

Second, right after the Xi-Ma summit in 2015, ROC's Mainland Affairs Council pointed out that the Consensus 'is to honor ROC's sovereignty and the dignity of Taiwan, which is written in the Constitution of ROC...'⁷ Since Ma openly linked the Consensus to the Constitution of the ROC, some citizens might believe that the Consensus is the agreement between PRC and ROC that each side is seen as an independent country.

Third, psychology research shows that people are cognitive miser and often project their desire to the perception of others (Ross et al., 1977; Krueger, 1988). Likely, some supporters of the independence movement may implicitly link their belief with the 1992 Consensus. The cognitive limitation might also make it difficult for citizens to update their knowledge about the

⁷ For details, please see:
<https://ws.mac.gov.tw/001/Upload/OldWeb/www.mac.gov.tw/ct9eb3.html?xItem=113320&ctNode=5649&mp=1>.

current state of cross-Strait relations. Hence, respondents who support Taiwan's independence movement should be drawn to option (3).

These four items can serve for various goals. First, if our subjects did not answer the same on all of these four questions, it implies that our subjects really can tell the difference between the four definitions in Q19. Besides, by juxtaposing different definitions of the 1992 Consensus, we can estimate the popularity of each of them; in advance, we can use our measures to decomposing the poll results favoring the 1992 Consensus in previous research. In the end, we can explore how Taiwanese people with different backgrounds and motivations (mis)perceive and (mis-)support the 1992 Consensus under different scenarios.⁸

Measuring Public Support for the 1992 Consensus

Deep Interview and Pre-Registration

Before implementing the survey, we conducted numerous interviews to examine whether Taiwanese citizens could understand the options. Between June 10 and June 17, 2018, six Taiwanese respondents with various backgrounds were recruited through the online post. The procedure of the deep interview is as follows. The subjects were asked to read each question and report immediately if he or she did not understand the description. Before reading the options, they were asked to imagine his or her answer. Afterward, each participant would check if their answer match one of the options. This procedure was repeated until the subject completed the whole

⁸ Aside from the reasons given, some may question why we specifically designed these four different versions of the 1992 Consensus in our survey. Indeed, there exist other considerations and phrasings of the Consensus. Our rationale is largely drawn from existing debates and common misperceptions of the Consensus in Taiwan. The 1992 Consensus, which was coined by Su Chi in 2000, refers to the "One China with respective interpretations." It is an abbreviation with respect to the changing dynamics of cross-Strait relations. The original documentation of what "One China" means is thus ambiguous as well. According to the Mainland Affairs Council of the Republic of China (Taiwan), the definition of "One China" can be referred all four different options we adopted in our survey, with respect to different "interpretations" from either side and the existing de facto separation (MAC, 1992). This document also specifies China's claim, which is the option (4) in our survey.

questionnaire. It took about 45 minutes for each subject to complete the deep interview. Subjects were then debriefed and compensated with NTDS\$500. Table 1 provides information for the 6 interviewees.

Subject No.	Gender	Age	Degree	Major	Political Orientation
1	Male	28	College	Library	Pan-Green
2	Male	35	College	Law	None
3	Male	41	Master	Electrical Engineering	Pan-Green
4	Female	24	2yr College	Accounting	Pan-Blue
5	Female	31	Master	Physical Health	Pan-Green
6	Female	58	PhD	Computer Science	Pan-Blue

Throughout the interviews, subjects understood most of the questions and options. Most importantly, they had no trouble comprehending questions revolving around the Consensus (Q19, Q20, Q21, Q22, and Q23). All suggestions were addressed before the survey was implemented. The deep interview procedure enhances our confidence that our subjects would have the ability to differentiate between the nuances of the Consensus.

After the interviews, the whole survey was pre-registered on Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP, <http://egap.org/>) and Open Science Foundation (OSF, <https://osf.io/b4u2d/>). In the pre-registration, the final version of the survey design, the procedure of the survey implementation, the number of subjects, and the R code for analysis were all included. The two pre-registrations were completed before June 28, 2018.

Survey Implementation

During July 6-9, 2018, 1003 subjects were recruited through the PollcracyLab, an online questionnaire platform maintained by National Chengchi University in Taipei, Taiwan. The PollcracyLab built and maintained the subject frame based on the Taiwan government’s household registration records. Therefore, all Taiwanese citizens have a non-zero probability to be invited for

registration by PollcracyLab. Compared with other opted-in platforms such as Amazon MTurk or Survey Sampling International, the PollcracyLab offers data with higher diversity and representativeness.

Subjects received a letter invitation asking them to participate in a survey titled ‘Survey of Public Opinion and Political Participation.’ Subjects were informed that they could skip any question, and their responses will remain anonymous. The anonymity of the subjects was ensured, as the PollcracyLab deidentified all the responses before releasing the data to us. Overall, the questionnaire includes 31 items, and the items related to the 1992 Consensus were Q19, Q20, Q21, Q22, and Q23. After answering a few questions on news consumption, political interest, and partisanship before proceeding to questions about the Consensus. After the definitional question of the Consensus was completed, subjects then chose to support or oppose the next several questions asking if they ‘*support or oppose our government to accept the 1992 Consensus under the four definitions in Q19*’, respectively. They were then debriefed and compensated with NTD\$100 by the PollcracyLab. Most of the subjects completed the survey (1001 people; 99.8%).

Our survey was fielded after the incumbent president, Tsai Ing-wen, has come into power for two years. Beijing’s Taiwan policy has maintained quite monotone, not to engage in any official interactions with a pro-independence incumbent party, like DPP. Simultaneously, the US-China trade frictions have just begun, and it is hard to contextualize how US-China relations would play a role in affecting the public’s perception toward the 1992 Consensus. Nevertheless, from the hindsight, we do know that DPP lost its midterm gubernatorial elections to KMT, and Tsai’s approval rating remained low. The context of our survey implemented in July 2018 indicates a relatively neutral environment where the incumbent DPP government did not enjoy strong public support, and Beijing was not extremely hostile, in comparison to the situations in the following

years. Thus, we are confident that our findings represent how the Taiwanese public interprets the 1992 Consensus in the past where a strong bi-partisan divide exists. Of course, after the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the constant military threats in 2020, and the worsen US-China relationship, the Taiwanese public may alter their views of the Consensus. This certainly requires further investigation.

Representativeness

Table 2 illustrates the background information of our subjects. Compared to the population of Taiwan, our subjects were more likely to be younger, male, and support pan-green parties or have no party affiliations. According to the PollcracyLab establisher’s report in 2012, our subjects are nationally representative among those below 50 years old (Yu, 2012).⁹

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of the PollcracyLab subject

<i>Gender</i>	Male	543 (54.3%)
	Female	458 (45.8%)
<i>Age</i>	20~29	184 (18.4%)
	30~39	326 (32.6%)
	40~49	274 (27.4%)
	50~59	150 (15.0%)
	60 up	65 (6.5%)
<i>Education</i>	Elementary or None	3 (0.3%)
	Middle School	4 (0.4%)
	Senior High	124 (12.4%)
	Junior College	182 (18.2%)
	College and up	688 (68.8%)
<i>Monthly Family Income</i>	Below NTD \$20,000	45 (4.5%)
	\$20,000~\$50,000	223 (22.3%)
	\$50,000~\$80,000	347 (34.7%)
	\$80,000~\$150,000	286 (28.6%)
	\$150,000 and above	90 (9.0%)
<i>Party Identity</i>	Pan-Blue	394 (39.4%)
	Pan-Green	483 (48.3%)
	None	124 (12.4%)
<i>Ethnicity</i>	Mainlander	144 (14.4%)
	Non-mainlander	857 (85.7%)

⁹ Some scholars also contend that the survey data collected by PollcracyLab can be considered representative (e.g., Rich, 2018; Rich, Dahmer, and Eliassen, 2019).

Results

Definitions of the 1992 Consensus

Table 3 illustrates how subjects defined the Consensus. About one-third of the subjects chose option (2), and another one-third chose the trick option (3). In contrast, only one in eight chose option (1). What is clear from this result is that citizens do not have a consensus on what the 1992 Consensus entails.

Table 3. How Taiwanese defines the '1992 Consensus'

<i>Definition</i>	Number of Respondents
Both ROC and PRC government respectively claim that it represents the whole China.	166 (16.6%)
ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland. Two governments belong to the same country which was not unified yet.	341 (34.1%)
ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland. Two governments belong to two different countries.	334 (33.4%)
PRC represents the whole China, and ROC is the local government under PRC.	49(4.9%)
None of the above/Do not answer	111(11.1%)

How do we explain such a divergence? Partisanship matters. Table 4 shows how each party supporter perceived the 1992 Consensus. As expected, Pan-Blue supporters tend to follow former chairmen Lien's and Ma's definitions (45.3%). However, 31.5% of Pan-Blue supporters chose that the Consensus refers to a country-to-country agreement. Most Pan-Green supporters and non-partisans perceived the 1992 Consensus as a route toward establishing 'two countries,' in line with their political beliefs. Even though the Chi-squared test shows that there is a significantly different distribution among the partisans and non-partisans, the distribution in each column also shows that there is no consensus even among citizens.

Table 4. Partisanship by Definitions

<i>Definition</i>	Pan-Blue supporters	Pan-Green supporters	Non-partisans
Both ROC and PRC government respectively claim that it represents the whole China.	75 (20.7%)	70 (16.6%)	21 (19.6%)
ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland. Two governments belong to the same country which was not unified yet.	164 (45.3%)	139 (33.0%)	38 (35.5%)
ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland. Two governments belong to two different countries.	144 (31.5%)	180 (42.7%)	40 (37.4%)
PRC represents the whole China, and ROC is the local government under PRC.	9 (2.5%)	32 (7.6%)	8 (7.4%)
Chi-squared test	Value=26.4, df=6, p<0.0001		

An alternative hypothesis is that the result has to do with the representativeness of our data. To verify this claim, Table 5 shows how people of different backgrounds made choices. In short, we found that no single sociodemographic or political factor could fully explain the findings. ANOVA analysis shows that the respondent's age cannot explain their choice. The same can be said for other factors such as respondents' interest in politics.

Additionally, we ran a multinomial regression to explain how citizens defined the Consensus. As shown in Table 6, after controlling for all related covariates, no variable, except for the respondent's age, could explain the choice of the 1992 Consensus. While we found that older citizens were more likely to select the Lien-KMT's definition instead of the trick option, the effect was limited. Controlling all other variables at their means, our simulation shows that a 21-30 years old respondent is 33.1% likely to choose option (2) and 41.9% likely to choose option (3); meanwhile, a 60-up respondent is 47.9% likely to choose (2) and 31.7% likely to choose (3). Even

though there was a certain amount of change, a considerable proportion of the respondents still chose the country-to-country definition.

Table 5. ANOVA analysis of Socio-demographics by Definitions

<i>Definition</i>	AGE	EDU	Political Interest	News Consumption
Both ROC and PRC government respectively claim that it represents the whole China.	2.57	4.67	3.47	2.01
ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland. Two governments belong to the same country which was not unified yet.	2.79	4.49	3.43	2.09
ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland. Two governments belong to two different countries.	2.51	4.57	3.33	1.99
PRC represents the whole China, and ROC is the local government under PRC.	2.39	4.61	3.20	2.12
ANOVA Analysis	F=3.124 p=0.08	F=0.476 p=0.49	F=6.36 p=0.01*	F=0.023 p=0.879

To recap, additional tests, shown in Table 4, 5, and 6, indicate no consensus regarding the 1992 Consensus among these different subgroups. Specifically, Table 6 renders that Taiwanese people did not perceive the 1992 Consensus by partisan motivations or the cues from their partisan elites. Thus, we contend that even a representative survey on Taiwanese people would reach similar outcomes that we present in our paper.

Table 6. Multinomial Regression on the Perception of the 1992 Consensus

<i>IV</i> \ <i>DV</i>	<i>Option (1)</i> <i>Option (3)</i>	<i>Option (2)</i> <i>Option (3)</i>	<i>Option (4)</i> <i>Option (3)</i>
Pan-Blue = 1	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Pan-Green = 1	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Age 1~5	n.s.	+ *	n.s.
Education 1~5	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Income 1~5	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Mainlander = 1	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Political Interest 1~4	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

News Consumption 1~4	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
AIC: 2121.998 Residual Deviance: 2067.998			

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. n.s. = no statistical significance. + sign = positive coefficient.

Public Support for Different Version of the 1992 Consensus

After the respondents chose their definition of the Consensus, the next four questions asked the extent to which they would support the government to accept each version of the 1992 Consensus. Table 7 illustrates the percentage of respondents supporting the government to accept such a 1992 Consensus. Among all four options, the trick option received the most support, while the PRC's definition received the least support. It is worth noting that the Lien-KMT definition did not receive the majority of support, either – with only 48.5% of support. Thus, we could infer from this result that public support for the Consensus is highly dependent on the details of it.

Besides, Table 7 shows that our subjects were aware of the differences between these four options, as the responses seem rather random. If the respondents could reveal their preference on the various definitions of the Consensus, we could infer with confidence that the subjects knew the differences among the options in Q19. Hence, the non-consensus phenomenon we have established does have internal and external validities.

Table 7. Supporting each definition of the 1992 Consensus

	<i>Definition</i>	<i>% yes</i>
Do you support the government to admit the 1992 Consensus defined as:	Both ROC and PRC government respectively claims that it represents the whole China.	40.0%
	ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland. Two governments belong to the same country which was not unified yet.	48.5%
	ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland. Two governments belong to two different countries.	75.1%
	PRC represents the whole China, and ROC is the local government under PRC.	10.1%

Did partisanship play a role here, too? Table 8 shows that, as expected, most of the Pan-Blue partisans supported the Lien-KMT definition (61.7%). However, those Pan-Blue supporters also supported the country-to-country claim (65.7%). It is quite surprising that the pro-China subgroup supports the country-to-country claim more. Overall, all three subgroups disapproved of the PRC’s definition (option 4) and were lukewarm toward the Cold-War propaganda (option 1).

Table 8. Supporting each definition by partisanship

	<i>Definition</i>	Pan-Blue supporters	Pan-Green supporters	Non-partisans
Do you support the government to admit the 1992 Consensus defined as:	Both ROC and PRC government respectively claim that it represents the whole China.	47.0%	35.4%	35.5%
	ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland. Two governments belong to the same country which was not unified yet.	61.7%	37.9%	47.6%
	ROC represents Taiwan, PRC represents the Mainland. Two governments belong to two different countries.	65.7%	83.2%	72.6%
	PRC represents the whole China, and ROC is the local government under PRC.	10.4%	10.4%	8.1%

Last, Table 9 shows the results of the four logit regressions used to examine the factors supporting each definition of the Consensus. Among all the covariates, partisanship did play a role for citizens’ evaluations of the Consensus – Pan-Blue supporters tended to ask the government to accept the Lien-KMT definition, while the Pan-Green supporters were much likely to favor the country-to-country argument. Age matters as well. Older citizens showed a higher level of support toward option (2), while younger citizens supported option (3) more.

Table 9. Logit Regression on the Support of different versions of 1992 Consensus

<i>IV</i>	<i>DV</i>	<i>Supporting option (1)</i>	<i>Supporting option (2)</i>	<i>Supporting option (3)</i>	<i>Supporting option (4)</i>
Pan-Blue = 1		n.s.	+ *	n.s.	n.s.
Pan-Green = 1		n.s.	- *	+ **	n.s.
Age 1~5		n.s.	+ ***	- ***	n.s.
Education 1~5		n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Income 1~5		- **	n.s.	n.s.	- **
Mainlander = 1		n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Political Interest 1~4		n.s.	n.s.	- **	- *
News Consumption 1~4		n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
n		983	983	983	983
AIC		1312.9	1293.3	1034.9	653.22

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Conclusion

Although existing studies and polls consistently show that citizens in Taiwan support the 1992 Consensus, our survey challenges this conventional wisdom. We found that although citizens in Taiwan overwhelmingly support the Consensus, most have vague ideas about what it represents: one-third of respondents defined the 1992 Consensus as “PRC and ROC as two countries,” quite the opposite from the term’s meanings. In a nutshell, ironically, citizens in Taiwan do not have a consensus on the 1992 Consensus, adding in relevant covariates did not change the result.¹⁰ Several surveys further buttress our findings by various institutions in Taiwan, including the Mainland Affairs Council. All these surveys presented results identical to ours.¹¹

Our findings have important implications for cross-Strait relations. PRC often designs and implements its Taiwan policy with the assumption that most citizens in Taiwan support the Consensus. While that might be true, Beijing will be surprised, according to our research, to find out that most Taiwanese do not support the one proposed by PRC. On the other hand, our study

¹⁰ Our survey is a cross-section one, so we cannot distinguish between the age and cohort effect. However, as is shown in the simulation result for Table 7, the age effect is also limited.

¹¹ The number was released by the Minister of the Mainland Affairs Council at the Legislative Yuan. For more information, please consult with <https://musou.tw/focuses/1541>.

calls for more attention on the Taiwan side to gain a better understanding of how the public interprets the Consensus. With an inaccurate assumption that the majority of Taiwanese citizens support the PRC's version of the Consensus, PRC may have overestimated the public support for unification and the notion of "one country, two systems" and implemented unwelcoming Taiwan policy resulting in backlashes to its cross-Strait goals. In addition, policymakers and the Consensus embracer such as KMT may have miscalculated the support for the Consensus and packaged the cross-Strait policy unwanted by the Taiwanese public. We have evidenced its consequence in the 2020 Taiwanese general elections and the Sunflower movement against the KMT-led policy approach toward China. These all demonstrate that having an accurate read of the public support for the 1992 Consensus and how the Taiwanese public actually interprets it is critically important for policymakers across the Strait.

In addition to our findings, another contribution from this study is that we provide a new way to interpret previous polls and studies on the Consensus. In TNSS, around 60% of respondents supported the government to use the 1992 Consensus as the basis for cross-Strait relations. In our survey, one-third of the respondents perceived the 1992 Consensus as the country-to-country agreement, and this interpretation enjoyed nearly 75% of support as the basis for accepting the consensus. Predictably, the PRC will object to such a pro-independence interpretation, so the fact that many citizens in Taiwan chose it as the content provides strong evidence that the Taiwanese public has misinterpreted the Consensus.

The popularity of supporting the country-to-country argument is in line with current studies on the identity of citizens in Taiwan. For example, Wang et al. (2011) found that through a survey that 80% of Taiwanese people referred to Taiwan as 'my country' and Taiwanese people as 'my Countrymen.' On the contrary, only 15% of the respondents made similar comments about the

PRC. In another study, analyzing 2002-2016 TNSS surveys, Wang (2017) found that the younger generations in Taiwan identified themselves as ‘Taiwanese’ for non-materialistic reasons. Both studies help explain why the country-to-country explanation of the Consensus enjoyed high levels of support in our study.

One limitation of this study is the representativeness of our subjects. Even though all Taiwanese residents have a non-zero probability to be invited by the PollcracyLab through the official household registration record, not everyone would accept the invitation. Thus, the sample is skewed to leaving those having difficulties in internet access out. Additionally, citizens who do not have an interest in politics might also opt-out of the survey. The percentage of non-partisans in our sample is lower than the recent representative telephone survey in Taiwan, which is over 50% in 2017 (Wang and Wang, 2018). Despite these shortcomings, we contend that these issues could be mitigated because there appears to be no consensus among any subgroups based on partisanship, age, education, and other background demographic variables.

Going forward, our results point to three research agendas. First, what is the linkage between the perception of the Consensus and vote choice? Since Taiwan has lowered its threshold for referendums from 2017, the number of referendums has increased to 10 in the 2018 general elections. Future referendums would likely involve more sensitive topics of cross-Strait relations. Therefore, our study of the 1992 Consensus might provide insights into what these referendums will be about and how it may influence electoral outcomes.

Second, will citizens alter their perception of the Consensus after being offered the correct definition, as one-third of our subjects wrongly believed that the 1992 Consensus is a country-to-country agreement? We speculate that the answer might be harmful. Previous studies in political psychology reveal that people hardly change their political beliefs; corrections might even backfire

(Nyhan and Reifler, 2010). How Taiwanese people perceived such a Consensus and how they process contradicting information can offer interesting lessons for theories of political psychology and attainment of political knowledge.

The third venue of research is how the withering of the 1992 Consensus would influence the US-China-Taiwan triangular relationship? In our sample, the younger generations were much likely to perceive the 1992 Consensus as a country-to-country agreement, which may be attributed to their Taiwanese identity (Wang, 2017) or lack of interest in the (re)unification. If this result is due to a cohort effect, then our results may suggest that the negotiation space between China and Taiwan under the 1992 Consensus may be narrower as time goes by. Hence, the growing irrelevance of the 1992 Consensus provides a challenge to the future cross-Strait relations and impose a strategic dilemma for the United States regarding how to maintain peaceful cross-Strait relations.

Consensus-building is an important tool for maintaining peace and security in the international society. As the detente gradually wears off and tensions start to rise again across the Strait, Taiwan and China need a consensus more than ever. The 1992 Consensus, unfortunately, is not one of them. In our survey, the public in Taiwan has clearly expressed its stance on Taiwan's relationship with China. It might be a good starting point to begin building the first truly consensus across the Strait.

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