

# The Impact of Han Kuo-yu's Populist Rhetoric in the 2018 Kaohsiung Mayoral Election

*Nathan F. Batto*\*

## 《Abstract》

How did Han Kuo-yu shoot from political obscurity to become the mayor of Kaohsiung and then the KMT presidential candidate? This paper argues that Han's rise was grounded in his populist appeal. Han told voters that things should have been better for ordinary people except that establishment politicians had consistently failed to represent their interests. This paper examines Han's populist rhetoric with an in-depth look at Han's statements in the 2017 KMT party chair election and 2018 Kaohsiung mayoral campaign. It then looks at public opinion data from the 2018 Kaohsiung mayoral election to see whether voters absorbed that rhetoric. There are, in fact, clear echoes of Han's populist rhetoric in the survey data. Acceptance of Han's rhetoric was associated with a vote for Han, even among voters who were not traditional KMT constituents. That is, Han's populist rhetoric played a central role in expanding his appeal and enabling him to secure an unlikely victory in Kaohsiung.

**Keywords:** populism, Han Kuo-yu, Kaohsiung mayoral election, campaign rhetoric

---

\* Associate Research Fellow, Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica and Election Study Center, National Chengchi University.

## Introduction

Han Kuo-yu was a fairly anonymous legislator in the 1990s, and then he faded into political obscurity during the Chen Shui-bian and Ma Ying-jeou years. He re-emerged into the national political limelight in 2017, running for the KMT party chair, though he did not come close to winning. In 2018, he won the KMT nomination for Kaohsiung City mayor, a race most observers considered to be hopeless for the KMT. Against all odds, Han's campaign caught fire. In the late summer, his polls skyrocketed from dismal levels into an outright lead. Han became a media superstar, with blanket coverage on several cable news channels. Not only did he win, but his "Han Wave" was widely credited with pulling many other KMT candidates to victory. In early 2019, Han seemed to be the KMT's great hope. Polls showed him leading the presidential race by a wide margin, and the Han magic seemed unstoppable. And then, during the spring and summer of 2019, even as Han secured the KMT's presidential nomination, his popularity began to decline. By the fall, Han had fallen decisively behind Tsai, and he would never recover. After the KMT's embarrassing defeat in the January 2020 presidential and legislative elections, Han suffered the unprecedented humiliation of being recalled from his mayoral post in June 2020. In just two years, Han had rocketed from obscurity to meteoric heights and then plummeted to a dramatic crash. How did this happen? In this paper, I focus on the first half of that arc, looking at Han's unlikely but meteoric rise in 2017 and 2018.

I argue that the key to Han's surge in popularity was his populist appeal. Han's political rhetoric drew on many elements of classic populist appeals. Most centrally, Han told voters that things should have been better for ordinary people except that establishment politicians had consistently failed to represent their interests. This populist rhetoric allowed Han to expand his support beyond the KMT's traditional coalition into voters who did not have any particular affection for the KMT and who did not think of themselves as having a Chinese identity. In the 2018 election, survey evidence shows clearly that Han was quite popular among these politically

neutral voters and even among voters who might normally be expected to support the DPP. Moreover, this support was associated with attitudes featuring prominently in Han's populist rhetoric. That is, Han's ability to expand his support beyond the traditional KMT coalition was a direct result of his populist argument.

In this paper, I first review the literature on populism. Populism is often used to mean very different ideas both in the academic literature and in popular discourse, so it is necessary to carefully unpack exactly what a populist discourse entails. This paper treats populism as a specific discourse. Populism is thus defined by content, not by form. Second, I look at Han's populist rhetoric in 2017 and 2018. Han gave a very thorough explanation of his philosophy in the two forums during the KMT party chair election in 2017, and he stuck very closely to this discourse over the next few years. Since this is such a complete presentation of an already fully-formed discourse, I examine Han's rhetoric in these two forums in depth before looking at his adjustments during the Kaohsiung mayoral campaign. Third, I turn to public opinion data to try to find evidence that Han's discourse affected public opinion and vote choice in the 2018 Kaohsiung mayoral race. I find clear echoes of his rhetoric in the 2018 TEDS post-election survey. More importantly, there is clear evidence that Han's populist discourse was associated with voter support from outside traditional KMT core constituencies. This is consistent with the idea that populist arguments allowed Han to expand his coalition and eventually secure an unlikely victory in the Kaohsiung mayoral race.

## **What is populism?**

Populism is a notoriously vague concept (Van Kessel 2014). Scholars have defined it in terms of personal charisma, the level of formal campaign organization (Weyland 2001; Kenney 2017; Roberts 2006), specific policy appeals, an ability to draw big crowds (Weyland 2001; Roberts 2006), and as a political style (Moffitt and Tormey 2013; Ostiguy 2017), to name a few. In popular discourse, it is often used to

mean that the candidate panders to certain voters, such by making unrealistic promises to workers, and other pundits may use it to mean as little as that the candidate is popular. Because of this, some scholars have concluded that the term is beyond salvation and should be abandoned entirely.

However, recent work on populism has increasingly converged on defining populism as a specific discourse. That is, all populists stress certain themes in their rhetoric. Of course, no two politicians will be exactly alike, since the specific form that appears in a particular place depends on the concrete context of that setting (Urbinati 2019, 114). Nevertheless, there are some commonalities (Stanley 2008; Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). The discourse-centered conception of populism has a few distinct advantages. For one thing, it clarifies the importance of some of the other proposed features of populism. For example, populists are often boorish, but not all boorish politicians are populists. A focus on the importance of discourse illuminates why boorishness might help to communicate specific ideas about what the politician stands for. Likewise, not all candidates who pander to blue-collar voters are populists, though many populists will indeed engage in this type of pandering. What makes them populists is not the single isolated characteristic, but embedding that characteristic within an entire populist discourse. That is, most of the other purported characteristics of populism are results of the discourse. A second advantage of the discourse-based conception of populism is that it focuses attention on substance rather than more superficial elements such as style or organization. This conception of populism insists that, if populism succeeds, voters are attracted to populists because of their message, not merely because they wear certain clothing, speak in certain ways, or have slick advertising. Third, a discourse-based conception of populism illuminates how populism might affect democracy. As an anti-establishment appeal, populists have the potential to upset normal patterns of political competition. Sometimes established powers need to be shaken up, so sometimes populism can help to revitalize a democratic regime. However, in extreme forms of populism, populism offers a direct challenge to pluralist democracy. In sum, it

is much clearer why we should care about populism when it is conceptualized as a discourse-based phenomenon.

The foundation of populism is the idea that there is a *conflict between the common people and the elites*, and the populist represents the interests of the people (Mudde 2017; Urbinati 2019). This is a *moral* conflict, in which one side is Good and the other is Evil, knowingly and intentionally betraying the people (Mudde 2017; Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 515; Hawkins 2009, 1042; Müller 2016). The people are envisioned as a homogenous group who are pure, noble, and who represent the essence of the country (Stanley 2008). They are homogenous not merely in their identity but also in their desires. That is, the populist defines both who the people are and what they want (Müller 2016). In many cases, the rural population is held up as the purest form of national virtues, culture, and values. In other cases, a different group, such as workers, may play this role serving as the purest distillation of the national ethos.

In defining the people, populism is an act of creativity. The people rarely actually already exist as a cohesive block with a common purpose. The populist imagines them and then has the challenge of bringing that vision into reality. This creative act includes not just defining the boundaries of the group, it also involves endowing them with a purpose. That is, the populist insists not just on the right to explain who the people are but also what they want. In order to turn this vision into reality, the populist must convince the people that his vision of them is, in fact, their most important identity. Moreover, they must put aside other demands they may have as less important than the ones he ascribes to them (Moffitt and Tormey 2013, 389; Urbinati 2019, 118). This is both a challenge and an opportunity, since the people can be imagined in specific ways that are advantageous to the populist (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 9). The people are typically defined by secondary features, such as political power, socioeconomic status, nationality, or religion (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 9). However, there are limitations. The idea of the people must be articulated in such a way that the many citizens will recognize and

identify with (Mudde 2017, 31-32).

The people, as envisioned by the populist, do not include the entire population. Rather, the populist claims to represent “the real people.” Other citizens, who are not part of the real people, do not matter to the populist. The only truly democratic and legitimate majority is the one centered on the real the people. Moreover, since the populist represents the real people and the real people have a clear and homogeneous will, the populist sees a moral responsibility to pursue policies consistent with that will. Any opposition to the real people’s will is deemed legitimate and corrupt (Müller 2016).

This point is worth emphasizing. In populist rhetoric, the people are not one possible democratic majority among many potential democratic majorities. They are the only true and legitimate majority. Their will is the only legitimate guide to enact policy. The enemies of the people who would usurp the people’s rightful place in power are seen as fundamentally anti-democratic and illegitimate. This rhetoric thus places populism squarely at odds with liberal democracy, which sees many potential majorities in a pluralist society. Any majority is temporary, as it can be displaced by another majority as the people rearrange themselves (Urbinati 2019, 119-120; Rummen 2017).

Who are these actors who oppose the real people in the populist rhetoric? The elites continuously and purposefully betray the common people for their own selfish interests. That is, the common people are deprived the happy, prosperous, peaceful lives they should naturally have because the elites use their power to siphon off wealth. Further, they use this wealth to maintain themselves in power.

There are two common variants of populism: left-wing populism and right-wing populism. In left-wing populism, the elites include the political establishment as well as business elites with whom they conspire to siphon off wealth. In right-wing populism, the elites are somewhat different. They still include the political establishment, but right-wing populists often do not focus their attacks on business leaders (Urbinati 2019, 119). Instead, they often focus on cultural elites, such as

academics, journalists, artists, and social activists. Moreover, they often see these elites in alliance with an underclass, such as immigrants, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, homosexuals, or some other group that is not part of “the real people” (Müller 2016).

In this grand struggle against the elites, populists must continually demonstrate that they are on the side of the people and that the people support them. One way a populist can show he stands with the people is to show that the elites despise him. Populists often provoke elite denunciations by saying crass or impolite things (Ostiguy 2017), or by supporting a policy that seems implausible or poorly thought out. The inevitable criticism rarely weakens the populist. Rather it strengthens support among the common people because it makes him seem like one of them. Populists often encourage mass demonstrations of support, especially in the form of massive demonstrations or rallies (Weyland 2001, 12-13). These mass events legitimize the populist's claim to represent the popular will and delegitimize the efforts of political opponents to block specific policies or promote an alternate policy agenda. Some scholars have claimed that public opinion surveys can serve as a low-cost mechanism for populists to demonstrate their public support (Weyland 2001, 16). However, a crowd of avid citizens is vividly persuasive in a way that a cold table of survey results simply cannot be. On the other hand, a single crowd can be dismissed as a vocal, unrepresentative minority much more easily than a survey result. Demonstrations and surveys should thus be seen as complements rather than substitutes. However, big crowds and charismatic politicians are not, in and of themselves, indicators of populism. These are common features in populism, but many non-populists are also charismatic and enjoy widespread support.

Populism is not considered to be a fully developed ideology. That is, populism does not come with a full set of associated policies for the myriad problems facing society the way that socialism, Christian Democracy, libertarianism, or anarchism might. Instead, populism is often seen as a “thin ideology,” an approach, or a discourse. Populism can thus be grafted onto some other ideology in order to flesh out

its concrete context. We can thus see leftist populism, rightist populism, nationalist populism, or populism with some other ideology appropriate to the place and time (Stanley 2008; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017).

Populism will not be exactly the same in every case. Populists will shape their specific vision of populism to fit their particular context, their personal attributes, and their reading of what the population is ready to accept. However, any populist appeal should feature some common features. First, the populist should define the common people, explaining who the people are and what they want. Second, there should be a conflict between the common people and the elites, in which the machinations of the elites cause the common people to suffer. This should be presented as a moral conflict, not merely a technocratic debate as to which policy proposal will be better. The people suffer because the elites intentionally siphon away their prosperity. Third, the populist may propose specific policies, but the details of the policy proposals are less important than the idea that the populist stands with the people. What will make the policies successful is that the people can trust that they populist has the best interests of the people at heart.

### **Han Kuo-yui's Populist Rhetoric**

Since Han Kuo-yu's rise to prominence, he has been the subject of an enormous amount of discussion in the popular media, and many pundits have described him as a populist. However, pundits on TV talk shows, newspaper columns, blog posts, and social media are usually not precise with their conception of populism, and hot takes are famous for being inconsistent from one day to the next. Serious academic studies of Han's populism are much scarcer. Ho (2020) notes several significant ingredients of Han's appeal, such as the general sense that the economy was not booming, Han's identification with ordinary people, and the fact that Han had criticized KMT elites. However, Ho presents Han's populism mainly in terms of style, not content. That is, Ho stresses that Han presented a romantic story, spoke in

easily understand phrases, dressed like an ordinary person, and had unconventional mobilization strategies (Ho 2020). As noted above, there are theorists who define populism in terms of a political style, but this is no longer the mainstream understanding. Hu and Chiang's (2020) approach to populism is closer to the one used in this paper. They identify five themes central to populism and look to see if they can identify those themes in Han's campaigns. They do not find much evidence of populism. On the critical themes relating to the conflict between the common people and elites, Hu and Chiang argue that Han's rhetoric was really a matter of partisanship – Han attacked DPP elites rather than elites in general. In other instances, they observe that Han sometimes made populist statements and then gingerly backed away from them, arguing that this inconsistency somehow meant that he was not responsible for the original statements. They suggest that the Han fans who took these statements seriously bear the onus of populism, not Han himself. Some of the other themes are not as central to populism as they suggest. They conclude that in the 2018 mayoral campaign Han didn't display much of a clear populist pattern at all (Hu and Chiang 2020, 170). Thus, it is necessary to go through Han's campaign rhetoric to show that he did, in fact, use populist appeals to ask for votes.

### **The 2017 KMT Party Chair Election**

Han Kuo-yu re-emerged into national politics by running for KMT party chair in 2017. The KMT held two forums for the party chair contenders to present their ideas. Han used these forums to lay out a fully-formed populist vision, presenting several themes that, with only minor variations, would be staples over the next two years. First, Han laid the foundation for his argument by laying out the problem. Taiwan was once prosperous, but it had slid into economic and moral decay decline over the past few decades. Second, what the common people really wanted was simply to have a good life. That is, what they wanted was reasonable and attainable, but they had not gotten it. Third, the establishment politicians were elites who had become distant from the common people. More pointedly, they had betrayed the common people by pursuing power rather than acting for the people. Fourth, he would

pursue strategies and policies that would benefit the common people. Because Han's vision was so complete in 2017, I quote at length from the two party forums.<sup>1</sup>

Han started out by talking about how optimistic Taiwan had been in his youth.

*When I was young, I did my military service in Mazu. We were poor, but we were happy. After I got out of the military, I went to university during the day, and at night I rode my motorcycle to a hotel where I worked for eight hours as a security guard. It was a happy time. Why? We knew that tomorrow would be better than today, Taiwan's future was bright. Back then Taiwan was the best of Asia's Four Little Dragons; South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore all lagged behind us.<sup>2</sup>*

—Han Kuo-yu, First KMT party chair forum, April 29, 2017

In the second party forum, he talked about how prosperous Taiwan had been back in those days by telling a story of a bowl of eel larva soup that had sold for NT500,000. In his mind, Taiwan had been bright, optimistic, prosperous, and respected as the leader of the Chinese-speaking world.

Han further explained why Taiwan was so fortunate: because of enlightened leadership.

*Singapore doesn't have anything. They don't have water, electricity, vegetables, or fruit. Of the ASEAN countries, they have the fewest natu-*

---

<sup>1</sup> Most studies of populism do not quote at length from the candidate. However, I believe it is important to look carefully at the concrete rhetoric to evaluate whether that rhetoric does, in fact, match up with theoretical conceptualizations of populism. Of course, candidates rarely express themselves in exactly the same terms as scholars, so there will inevitably be disagreements about whether a certain statement is, in fact, evidence of a particular facet of populism. The goal here is to persuade the reader that, taken as a whole, Han presents himself in a way consistent with theoretical ideas of a discourse-based conception of populism.

<sup>2</sup> All translations are by the author.

*ral resources. ... But God gave Singapore a great leader, Lee Kwan-yew. Mainland China went through ten years of the Cultural Revolution, the nation was on the verge of breakdown. For ten years they had no government, no schools, the economy was a mess, tens of millions died. But God gave the Communist Party the best gift, Deng Xiaoping. God also gave Taiwan a very good president, Chiang Ching-kuo. No matter your ideology, you can see these three leaders have a common feature. They all started from a very difficult situation, but they worked hard to overcome all obstacles. Four words were most important: Hard work and honest work.*

—Han Kuo-yu, Second KMT party chair forum, May 6, 2017

Unfortunately, Han did not see contemporary Taiwan as the bright and optimistic place of his youth. Taiwan had slid into decay. Economically, Han lamented that Taiwan had fallen from being the most prosperous of the four dragons to the least prosperous. In his telling, almost every sector of the economy faced serious challenges, and most people his age worried about Taiwan's future. Even more alarming, Han lamented the moral decay of Taiwan's youth caused by those economic challenges.

*But look at what we have become today. Among all the Chinese areas, Taiwan is the most backward. Last year gangs of Taiwan fraudsters, 40 people, were arrested in Kenya and Malaysia and sent back to Taiwan in handcuffs. In February this year, over 200 Taiwanese youths, 200!!, were arrested in Spain, but this time they were sent to Mainland China. Last month, a student at NTU – just to make NT\$150,000 – transported drugs to Jakarta and was arrested. I guarantee, this youth's entire life is now ruined. Also last month, a 16 year old high school student transported drugs to New Zealand and was arrested. Everyone knows where the*

*world center of piracy is. It's in Somalia, in Africa. Do you know where the world's kingdom of fraudsters is? It's here in Taiwan! Our country is sick. Our Taiwan is wounded. What happened?*

*Why did the leading country of the four little Asian dragons, after President CCK passed away and left us the Hsinchu Science Park and the Ten Major Construction Projects – how did our country become this way? Our industriousness, our kindheartedness, our diligence, our simple goodness? The rest of the world looks at Taiwan and sees fraudsters and drugs. How do we explain this?*

—Han Kuo-yu, First KMT party chair forum, April 29, 2017

Han thus painted a clear picture. In the past, when Taiwan had an honest and enlightened leader who loved the people, society was prosperous and the people were good. Now, society had become impoverished, and the people had been forced into evil behavior just to try to survive.

In Han's second theme, he explained what the people really wanted. Fundamentally, the common people just hoped for good everyday lives. Han thus defined the common people as materialists, people who care primarily about their quality of life rather than about abstract ideas such as national identity, democratic rights, or human rights.

*The people don't want much; all they want is a safe home and a happy job. What is a safe life? Eat safely, live safely, worship safely, hope their children can grow up in a safe environment. What is a happy job? The want prosperity in every sector. Easy to make money. That's what the people want.*

—Han Kuo-yu, Second KMT party chair forum, May 6, 2017

Han argued that the common people had no need to think about high-level is-

sues such as national security. Instead, they could focus all their energy on economic development.

*The USA has the Taiwan Relations Act to protect Taiwan. But don't forget, what are we Taiwanese afraid of? First, war. Second, hunger. What is fear of war? National defense, the USA will protect us. What is fear of hunger? Will the USA ship bread to us? Will they send us free steaks? No. We have to rely on ourselves. In other words, on national defense, there is no problem. The USA will protect us. On economics, we have to rely on ourselves.*

—Han Kuo-yu, First KMT party chair forum, April 29, 2017

To put it another way, questions of sovereignty or national security were fake issues that the parties used in their incessant partisan conflict to distract the people. The genuine issues of politics should have been material, not ideological. In sum, the people did not want anything grandiose or unreasonable. They just wanted to live comfortable lives and provide for their children, the way their parents had in the CCK era.

This led into Han's third theme, which is at the heart of populist rhetoric, in which he explained the reason for the economic stagnation and why the people could not simply enjoy healthy and happy daily lives: the elite had betrayed the common people. The mild version of this theme is a suggestion that the elite had become distant from the common people and ceased to understand them. In the party chair forum, Han treated President Tsai fairly gently, merely insinuating that Tsai might be out of touch with the people or not have their interests at heart rather than directly making that accusation.

*Now we have President Tsai. The previous two presidents came from NTU Department of Law. NTU Law produces the best legal talent in the*

*entire country. ... Why is it that when people from the NTU Law are president they are either brainless or heartless. President Tsai, I have now watched you for a year. Where are you taking Taiwan? Do you have the ability to lead the Republic of China?*

—Han Kuo-yu, First KMT party chair forum, April 29, 2017

In this, Han reminded people that Tsai is an elite from Taiwan's top law school, suggesting that she is not like an ordinary person. He returned to this theme at the end of his speech, questioning whether Tsai cared enough about common people's needs. He also implicitly contrasted her unfavorably with "good" leaders by questioning whether she had the capability to lead effectively. Han did not explicitly accuse her of being an incompetent or evil leader, but the unspoken speculation was clear.

Han was less polite toward Tsai's three predecessors, who he called out by name and directly accused of betraying their responsibility.

*There are now three living ex-presidents, President Lee, President Chen, and President Ma. You were president for over twenty years. What industry did you leave behind for Taiwan? The only industry Taiwan has is in the Hsinchu Science Park; we don't have a second sector. Too tragic! You were president; you feasted and feasted. If it wasn't engaging in corruption, it was laziness and goofing off.*

—Han Kuo-yu, First KMT party chair forum, April 29, 2017

With this attack, Han laid the blame for Taiwan's sorry current state squarely at the feet of political elites who had sold out the people. Notably, two of the ex-presidents named are members of Han's own party. Han did not spare them. Rather, he explicitly puts them in the same category as Chen, who among KMT sympathizers

was widely detested and considered hopelessly corrupt. All the political establishment, including KMT elites, were guilty of betraying the common people.

The project to develop the Taoyuan Aerotropolis was a vivid example of this betrayal.

*Twenty years ago we decided to develop the Taoyuan Aerotropolis. One ping of land was NT7,000; now one ping is 200,000. All the promising plans that the government develops end up as real estate speculation and land price manipulation schemes. The entire Aerotropolis plan has been a failure.*

—Han Kuo-yu, First KMT party chair forum, April 29, 2017

Han further emphasized his disdain for the traditional KMT elites by talking about partisan conflict. The root of Taiwan's problem was not that the KMT had lost elections and was unable to implement enlightened KMT policies. Rather, partisan conflict was itself the root of the problem. The two parties had become so oriented toward winning power through partisan politics that the needs of the common people had become a lower priority, and this debilitating conflict had dragged the country down.

In the second party chair forum, Han started with an anecdote about how a peddler did not need to tie up his live crabs. They could not escape from his bucket because as soon as they tried to climb out the other crabs would pull them back down. Han then explained,

*These crabs are like the KMT and DPP. ... The blue and green are all tangled together. After decades of fighting, our blue and green are like those crabs that you can't pull apart. ...*

*For people under 30 years old, how have you grown up? You have grown up with ugly blue-green conflict. For decades, the blue-green con-*

*flict has never stopped. The ROC government came to Taipei in 1949. We've never seen such difficulty. Our country is sick. Our country really has problems. Our economy, our politics, our society, there are so many symptoms that pop up one by one. Our youth don't have a bright future. It's scary.*

—Han Kuo-yu, First KMT party chair forum, April 29, 2017

This leads to the fourth theme, that Han would pursue policies to benefit the common people. In populist discourse, good policies are not difficult to identify. That is, unlike normal politicians who might carefully study the effects different proposals to determine which ones work better, populists tend to simply assume that policies that side with the common people are obvious and will be effective.

Han first reiterated that he stood with the common people.

*The six candidates for party chair are all here. I have to admit, I may not be the most outstanding...; I may not be the smartest; I may not be the most senior. But I can guarantee you one thing. If Kuo-yu is elected as Chinese KMT party chair, [it shows that] a vegetable seller can achieve great things.*

—Han Kuo-yu, First KMT party chair forum, April 29, 2017

Han's reference to himself as a vegetable seller made him seem like a humble peddler at a traditional market. In fact, he had been the head of a major agency, the Taipei Agricultural Products Marketing Corporation, which purchased agricultural products from farmers and distributed them to traditional markets. Nonetheless, Han's rebranding of himself portrayed him as a member of the common people rather than as an out of touch member of the elite political establishment. As an ordinary person, he could understand the needs and desires of regular people.

In Han's view, there were no grand partisan divides on the types of policies

needed to improve people's everyday lives. These goals were universal values that everyone agreed on.

*The KMT wants a good economy, good education, good environment, good land planning, good public safety. Does the DPP not want those things? The DPP also wants a good economy, good education, good environment, and good land planning.*

—Han Kuo-yu, *Second KMT party chair forum, May 6, 2017*

The problem was not in identifying effective plans; everyone understood what would help the people. The problem was in implementing the plans without allowing them to be perverted and twisted by the corrupt political establishment. Thus, immediately after Han lamented that the Taoyuan Aerotropolis project had turned into a disastrous real estate speculation scheme, he proposed his own plan. He would simultaneously launch three aerotropolis schemes, one in Taoyuan, one in Kaohsiung, and one in Hualien. He did not explain why his expanded version of the plan would not be subject to the same fate as the earlier aerotropolis. The unspoken assumption seems to have been that his enlightened leadership would prevent such an outcome. None of his policy proposals seems to have been thoroughly thought out. A scheme to transform Kaohsiung into a destination wedding site seems to hinge entirely on the name of a local river, and a proposal to build a freeway with no speed limit on the east coast glazes over several obvious environmental and safety concerns. Nonetheless, Han insisted that these projects would revitalize the local economies, possibly bringing jobs to support hundreds of thousands of people.

In addition to his economic policies, Han also promised to heal the incessant political conflict that had dragged Taiwan down. He argued that the KMT should not reflexively fight with the DPP but should cooperate when that would benefit the people.

*We need to untangle this blue-green conflict. How can we do this? ... If I become the KMT party chair, I am willing to persuade the central standing committee members to try something new, a new, bolder, clearer, more generous way of thinking.*

—Han Kuo-yu, Second KMT party chair forum, May 6, 2017

### **The 2018 Kaohsiung Mayoral Election**

After failing to win the contest to become KMT party chair in 2017, Han turned his attention to seeking the Kaohsiung mayoral race. Han's rhetoric in the Kaohsiung mayoral election followed the themes from his party chair campaign very closely with only minor adjustments to fit the context of a mayoral race in Kaohsiung rather than a national intra-party contest.

Han continued to tell a story of a once prosperous society that had slipped into decline. For example, in a small rally on July 11, he repeated, with only minor variations, his optimism as a young man seeing that Taiwan was pre-eminent among the four dragons, Kaohsiung had fantastically expensive eel larva soup, with enlightened leaders including CCK. In fact, he claimed that while "Taiwan was flooded up to here [pointing to his knees] in money; in southern Taiwan, in Kaohsiung, we were flooded up to our navels in money." However, those days were gone, and now Taiwan had become known for trafficking drugs around southeast Asia.

Han did add a new, local wrinkle to this story of decline by talking about migration. He introduced the term, "drift north" to describe the phenomenon of Kaohsiung youth moving to Taipei to find jobs, which he painted as a tragic failure.

*Kaohsiung was the richest city in all of Taiwan. People from all the other cities and counties drifted to Kaohsiung. Penghu, Tainan, Chiayi, Yunlin, Pingtung all drifted to Kaohsiung. Why? Because we had money. Because we had job opportunities. So all the outsiders drifted toward Kaohsiung. Today, our children drift far away. Because we don't have*

*money. We don't have so many job opportunities. We aren't able to provide enough oxygen for our own children.*

—Han Kuo-yu, Fengshan rally, October 26, 2018

Han continued to stress that what the people really cared about were material questions. On the one hand, he constantly repeated that the people just wanted “good daily lives” and “safe homes and happy jobs.” On the other hand, he insisted that “politics” and “ideology” were not important, and it was a mistake for the people of Kaohsiung to bother with them.

*We know over the past few decades we weren't qualified to play politics. Politics are centered in Taipei; what sort of politics could we play? We aren't qualified to touch ideology. All those national questions, the entire ROC political center is in Taipei. What can you in Kaohsiung do? We should just concentrate on making money. We should just develop the economy. We should educate the next generation. We should just make sure we can have good daily lives. That's enough. Do we need to be so confused?*

—Han Kuo-yu, 85 Sky Tower luncheon, July 6, 2018

While Han saw Kaohsiung as stagnant, he insisted that there was no reason it could not become prosperous. Kaohsiung was blessed with several advantages, including its infrastructure, economic diversity, and geographical location. It was simply a matter of choosing to focus on the economy instead of on politics.

*Kaohsiung must refuse to be poor. We have 100% of the conditions needed to become Taiwan's richest city. In the USA, the political center is in Washington, the richest city is New York. In Mainland China the political center is in Beijing; the richest city is Shanghai. In the future, Kaoh-*

*siung people will be smarter and smarter, we know we don't want these things, we will start focusing on the economy, in the next five or ten years Taiwan will change, the political center will be in Taipei, the richest city will be Kaohsiung.*

—Han Kuo-yu, Sanmin rally, October 10, 2018

Han proposed a number of policies to create this economic growth. The defining features of most of these policies was that they were not particularly well-developed and seemed rather infeasible to many observers. Some of these policies included turning Kaohsiung into a hub for romantic tourism, exploring for oil on Taiping Island, setting up a village to attract wealthy immigrants from Hong Kong and Macao, personally leading delegations to potential buyers for Kaohsiung's agricultural products, encouraging youth to move in with seniors (thereby solving both the housing problem for youths and the elder care problem for seniors), and establishing a tax-free economic zone. Mayoral candidates often put forward grandiose schemes, but most try to present them as reasonable and well-thought out. Han dealt with the widespread criticisms that his schemes were impractical not by issuing white papers but by talking about character. His plans would work because he was sincerely trying to solve problems. At the mayoral debate, Han was asked whether he could implement his policies. He responded by talking about trust.

*This is a very important question. ... But I think there is an even more important question to ask before this one. Do the people still trust the government? ... If most people have doubts, distrust, are angry at their own government, how can the government implement its policies? ... Tell me, do Kaohsiung people still trust the city government? If most people don't trust the government, no matter what enlightened policies we have, will they be feasible? ... If people have trust, lots of policies will work more*

*smoothly. If most people don't trust, how can you do things?*

—Han Kuo-yu, mayoral debate, November 9, 2018

The actual details of the policies were not important. What was important was that voters could trust Han to do the right thing on behalf of the people.

Further, Han found a potent new symbol for his connection with ordinary people: mineral water and braised pork on rice. Han explained that he was not beholden to financial interests, so he would not need to attend lavish banquets. During his campaign, he went all over Kaohsiung with a simple bottle of water and a humble bowl of rice. Voters could trust Han not to be corrupt.

*We have high hopes that the 2018 Kaohsiung mayoral race will be very clean and very healthy. I insist on one bottle of mineral water, from the beginning of the campaign to the end. I don't have a campaign headquarters. I don't have a campaign chair. I haven't put up flags. I don't have a support organization. I don't hold banquets. I don't buy votes. I don't give gifts. Just one bottle of mineral water.*

—Han Kuo-yu, Fengshan rally, October 26, 2018

He did tone down the attacks on establishment politicians, especially those from the KMT. This choice made strategic sense. Former mayor Chen Chu was fairly popular and had not had any major corruption scandals.<sup>3</sup> At any rate, she was

---

<sup>3</sup> A search of the United Daily News Online archive for “Kaohsiung City” and “corruption” from January 1, 2015 to November 23, 2018 produced 58 results. This was fewer than the same search for Taipei City (121 results) and New Taipei City (91) but more than Tainan City (45), Taoyuan City (37), and Taichung City (32). Most of the results were something other than a case of corruption within the Kaohsiung City government, such as letters to the editor or a comment by a person from Kaohsiung on whether Chen Shui-bian should be pardoned. Of the thirteen relevant stories, eight involved police officers rather than ordinary bureaucrats. Four involved low-level bureaucrats. Only one involved a political appointee, and that was a story

not on the ballot. Attacking her as corrupt or uncaring would not likely have resonated as strongly with Kaohsiung voters as the argument that the local economy was stagnant. As a result, while Han did criticize Chen Chu a few times, he generally concentrated on the poor overall economic performance of Kaohsiung. As for KMT elites like former president Ma or party chair Wu Den-yi, Han gladly accepted their support, and both spoke at several of his rallies. Former legislative speaker Wang Jin-pyng played a crucial role in Han's campaign. Still, not everything was smooth between Han and the party establishment. On the third anniversary of his summit with Xi Jinping, Ma's foundation held a conference at which he declared that the ROC should not rule out unification. Han, who was trying to avoid such topics, issued a fairly sharp rebuke. People in Kaohsiung were sick of this topic, "right now, any discussion of independence and unification is what is least needed," Han said.<sup>4</sup> With less than two weeks before the election, Wu made a crude comment referring to Chen Chu as a sow. Han spent several minutes at his enormous Fengshan rally that weekend publicly disavowing Wu's attack. These incidents aside, Han was generally content to make his anti-establishment argument more indirectly in the mayoral campaign with his constant arguments that "politics" was at the root of Kaohsiung's economic malaise.

### **How Populist was Han's Rhetoric?**

Han's rhetoric featured most of the important ingredients of a populist discourse. Most opposition politicians try to focus voters' attention on problems in society, so complaining about economic stagnation is not inherently populist. More

---

about a final court decision on a case dating back to 2009 rather than some new bombshell. All of these stories were reported in either the local section or the society section; none was deemed important enough to be placed in the first four pages of the newspaper where the political news and other major news stories are typically found.

<sup>4</sup> Ko You-hao, 2018, "Ma Ying-jeou states new 'three no's,' This is what Han Kuo-yu says..." *Liberty Times*. 葛祐豪, 2018, 〈馬英九拋「新三不」韓國瑜這麼說...〉, 自由時報電子報, 11月8日, <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/2606012>, 檢索日期: 2020年11月27日。

to the point, when opposition politicians running in areas in which their party is not very popular argue that things are bad, this argument usually falls on deaf ears. Perhaps one reason that Han's argument resonated was that was not just a description of the current situation but was part of a broader explanation of how that situation had developed, who was to blame, and what could be done. The focus on economic stagnation was the starting point for his broader argument. Han had to first persuade voters that Taiwan had indeed suffered from decades of economic stagnation, something that was not necessarily evident to everyone at the outset. He further argued that economic malaise was causing ordinary people to suffer in both economic and moral terms. The people did not have unreasonable demands: they merely wanted a decent level of prosperity. The heart of Han's populist argument explained why the people were in this miserable state: economic stagnation was the result of decades of elite politicians looking out their own interests instead of those of the ordinary people. In other words, the elites had stolen the prosperity that rightly belonged to the common people. The result was not merely that incomes were a little lower, but that society could not take care of its children. Some were forced to move away, while others turned to drugs and the drug trade. The betrayal by the corrupt elites was thus a moral betrayal. After defining the problem and explaining its cause, Han presented a solution. He would govern for the people. Trust is useful for all politicians, but it is especially central for populists. Han asked voters to overlook the impracticality and crudeness of his policy proposals and to simply trust that he would govern effectively because, he argued, was like them and he had their best interests at heart.

One important element of populist discourse was largely missing from Han's rhetoric. Han did not define the common people in exclusionary terms. In the mayoral campaign, he did not talk about who were NOT part of the people. He talked about what the people wanted, but he did not identify a particular group as the embodiment of "the real people." As a result, Han's version of populism was built on a conflict between a tiny political elite and the broad masses of society rather than on

a social conflict between a dominant group in society fearful of losing their status and an underprivileged minority trying to seek equal status. Han's populism was thus much milder and perhaps less potent than classic textbook right-wing populism.

## Survey Evidence of the Impact of Han's Populist Rhetoric

Did voters respond to Han's populist rhetoric? Was populism the key to expanding Han's support beyond the KMT's traditional base in the Kaohsiung mayoral election? In fact, there is evidence that populist themes were associated with support for Han. In this section, I look at data from the TEDS 2014 and 2018 Kaohsiung post-election surveys.<sup>5</sup> The strategy here is not to build a comprehensive model of populism and then test whether the data fit that model or some other model better. The surveys were not designed with populism in mind, so there are several aspects of populism that simply are not present. I also do not build a comprehensive model looking at every aspect of the 2018 election. As in every election, there were a host of other things that arguably mattered, including debates over marriage equality and air quality, President Tsai's popularity, the behavior of local factions, relatively few aggressive statements from the PRC, electricity blackouts, the blandness of the DPP candidate, just to name a few. The goal here is simply to show that elements of Han's populist rhetoric appear in the empirical record, especially among voters who were not traditional KMT supporters. If Han's populist appeal did resonate with voters, do we actually see some of the consequences that we should expect to see?

I look for evidence of the impact of four specific aspects of Han's populist ar-

---

<sup>5</sup> Data analyzed in this article are from Taiwan's Election and Democratization Study, 2012-2016 (III): the Survey of the Nine-in-One Local Elections, 2014 (TEDS2014) (MOST 101-2420-H004-034-MY4) (Huang 2014) and Taiwan's Election and Democratization Study, 2016-2020 (III): The Survey of the Nine-in-One Local Elections, 2018 (TEDS2018) (MOST 105-2420-H-004-015-SS4) (Huang 2018). The coordinator of multi-year project TEDS and the principal investigator of TEDS2018 and TEDS2014 was Chi Huang. More information is on TEDS website (<http://www.tedsnet.org>). The author is responsible for the interpretation of these data.

gument. First, the premise of Han's case was that Kaohsiung had suffered severe economic malaise. Second, Han made a strong anti-establishment argument. Third, Han made arguments about corruption. Fourth, Han argued that people could trust him to pursue good policies because he understood and stood with the people. Unfortunately, there were no items in the 2018 survey related to Han's attempts to define what the common people wanted, so this study is unable to assess whether that appeal resonated with voters.

Han was a KMT nominee, and one would expect the foundation of his public support to be drawn from traditional sources of support for KMT candidates. The obvious place to start is with party identification. Voters who express a preference for a specific party will usually vote for that party's candidates (Campbell et al 1960; Yu 2017). In Taiwan, the parties are commonly divided into two large camps, with the KMT-led blue camp and the DPP-led green camp on the other. Table 1 shows that, of respondents who revealed a vote choice for either Han or the DPP's candidate, Chen Chi-mai, there is a stark difference among people with different partisan preferences. As expected, blue camp party identifiers overwhelmingly preferred Han (96.5%) while green camp party identifiers clearly preferred Chen (87.0%). Taiwan's party system is grounded in national identity (Achen and Wang 2017), so it can also be helpful to look at whether respondents consider themselves as Taiwanese, Chinese, or both. Depending on their answer to question, respondents were asked a follow-up question on how strongly they felt about this or on whether they slightly leaned one way or the other. This allows for a seven-point scale of identity, ranging from people who very strongly identify as Chinese to people who very strongly identify as Taiwanese. Table 1 shows that this scale is related to vote choice. Han wins almost all the votes of people in the first three categories, but his vote share declines with every subsequent category. There are two points to note from this discussion of party ID and national identity. First, these two traditional variables continued to structure vote choices, even in a year in which the KMT made huge gains in traditional green strongholds such as Kaohsiung. Second, Han

**Table 1: 2018 Two-party vote share by respondent's party ID and national ID**

	Chen (DPP) %	Han (KMT) %	n
Party ID			
Blue camp party ID	3.5	96.5	313
Neither blue nor green camp party ID	35.3	64.7	329
Blue camp party ID	87.0	13.0	324
Subtotal	42.3	57.7	966
National ID			
Very strong Chinese ID	3.8	96.2	26
Somewhat strong Chinese ID	0.0	100.0	9
Both, leans Chinese	3.8	96.2	26
Both, no lean	11.2	88.8	197
Both, leans Taiwanese	20.0	80.0	100
Somewhat strong Taiwanese ID	48.4	51.6	192
Very strong Taiwanese ID	65.7	34.3	408
Subtotal	42.3	57.7	958

Note: This table includes only respondents who reported voting for either Han or Chen. Data are unweighted.

Source: 2018 TEDS Kaohsiung mayoral post-election surveys.

did extremely well outside the KMT's traditional voter bases. He won people who did not identify with either the blue or green camps by nearly a two to one margin. He also won half the votes of people who identified somewhat strongly as Taiwanese.

In order to search for the impact of Han's populist discourse on non-traditional KMT voters, I present a series of simple logistic regressions. In all of these models,

the dependent variable is vote choice, with respondents who voted for Han coded one and respondents who voted for Chen Chi-mai coded zero.<sup>6</sup> All models include control variables for party ID, national identity, and Han's personal popularity. Those who expressed party ID for any of the blue camp parties (KMT, PFP, New Party) were coded as blue supporters. Those who identified with any of the green camp parties (DPP, NPP, TSU) were coded as green camp supporters. This produced two dummy variables, with the reference category as all respondents who did not identify with either major camp. National identity is the seven-point scale described above and used in Table 1, with one representing extremely strong Chinese identity and seven representing extremely strong Taiwanese identity. The final control variable is Han's personal popularity, how much respondents like Han on a scale of zero to ten. Personal popularity is not necessarily related to populist appeals. Populists are often charismatic and have significant personal appeal, but not all charismatic, likeable politicians are populists. By treating personal popularity as a control variable rather than as an indicator of populist appeals, these models are possibly underestimating the impact of Han's populism. Further, since the effect of the independent variables might be different for different sets of voters, I also run each model separately for voters who identify with parties in the blue camp, green camp, and neither camp.

### **Perceptions of economic malaise**

Han's argument was built on the premise that Kaohsiung had suffered serious economic stagnation over the past few decades. He was very successful in persuading Kaohsiung voters to agree with this premise.<sup>7</sup> One question asked, "How satis-

---

<sup>6</sup> Respondents who did not report voting for one of the two major candidates are excluded from this analysis.

<sup>7</sup> It bears repeating that talking about the lousy state of Kaohsiung's economy did not, in and of itself, make Han a populist. Rather, the economic argument is the precondition for the actual populist argument, in which Han argued that people had suffered due to the actions of the elites.

fied are you with the overall economic development of Kaohsiung City?" 60.7% of respondents answered that they were dissatisfied. One might imagine that this simply reflected the objective reality of Kaohsiung's decades-long economic decline. However, this does not appear to be how Kaohsiung voters understood things just four years earlier. The 2014 survey did not ask the same question; the closest was a question asking how satisfied respondents were with Kaohsiung's industrial and commercial development. Only 37.7% expressed dissatisfaction (Table 2). Even allowing for some differences due to the question wordings, the large increase makes it likely that Han's argument that Kaohsiung's economy was lousy had some impact.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Populism Variables (by Party ID)**

Year of Election	2014				2018			
Respondent's Party ID	all	blue	neither	green	all	blue	neither	green
Economic development poor					<b>60.7</b>	77.8	62.3	43.2
Dissat. w/ industrial, commercial dev.	<b>37.7</b>	53.5	37.5	29.3				
Youth must go north					<b>73.8</b>	86.5	75.8	59.7
Neither party understands					<b>20.4</b>	18.7	22.7	18.9
Liking Ma (0-10 scale) (mean)	<b>2.75</b>	4.83	2.82	1.54				
Liking Ma, Wu, Chu (0-10) (mean)					<b>3.71</b>	5.20	3.59	2.44
City officials corrupt	<b>30.0</b>	39.0	28.9	26.4	<b>40.4</b>	54.4	38.3	30.1
Mayors abuse govt resources	<b>25.1</b>	37.3	21.3	23.3	<b>40.1</b>	63.7	36.4	28.2
Understand people (Yang/Han is best)	<b>13.8</b>	39.0	11.2	3.3	<b>56.4</b>	91.5	54.9	26.4
Trustworthy (Yang/Han is best)	<b>13.1</b>	46.9	8.2	1.0	<b>48.0</b>	91.2	43.0	14.9

Note: See text for description of variables.

Source: 2014 and 2018 TEDS Kaohsiung mayoral post-election surveys.

In addition to general dissatisfaction with the economy, Han drew attention to

one specific consequence of that economic stagnation: youth out-migration. He repeatedly illustrated Kaohsiung's long-term economic decline by talking about how young people had to "drift north" to find jobs. Migration northward was not a new phenomenon in 2018, but Han focused attention on it, gave it a memorable label, and explained to voters how they should understand it. Respondents were asked, "Some people say: 'The outflow of young population will affect the development of Kaohsiung City.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?" 73.8% agreed.

The high prevalence of negative views suggests that Han was planting his populist rhetoric in surprisingly fertile soil. While most people had initially assumed that Kaohsiung would not be receptive to Han's message, even green camp sympathizers conceded that Kaohsiung had problems.

These negative views of Kaohsiung's economy were correlated with voting for Han. For each question, I create a dummy variable coded one if the respondent gave a negative evaluation (dissatisfied or agree that the problem is serious) and zero otherwise. Table 3 shows that both of these variables have positive and significant coefficients, indicating that voters who had negative views of Kaohsiung's economy were, in fact, more likely to vote for Han. Running the model separately for blue camp, neutral, and green camp identifiers shows that these economic evaluations had a significant impact on vote decisions for all three groups. Dissatisfaction with Kaohsiung's overall economic development was correlated with votes for Han, even controlling for party, national identity, and Han's personal popularity.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> We should not rule out the possibility that some of this support for Han was purely due to economic conditions. My argument is that this argument was particularly potent in this particular context because Han explained how voters should understand the poor economy with his wider populist argument. However, voters are a diverse group, and not all react in exactly the same way.

**Table 3: Logit models of populism and vote choice: perceptions of the economy**

Party ID	all	blue	neither	green
Constant	-2.507* (.798)	-1.533 (2.456)	-1.089 (1.041)	-7.755* (1.812)
Blue camp party ID	1.334* (.384)			
Green camp party ID	-2.227* (.268)			
National ID (1-7 scale)	-.269* (.100)	-.269 (.268)	-.377* (.137)	-.049 (.205)
Liking Han (0-10 scale)	.642* (.067)	.706* (.205)	.545* (.081)	.835* (.141)
Economic development poor	.906* (.244)	.462 (.784)	.775* (.315)	1.162* (.472)
Youth must go north	1.123* (.287)	1.158* (.772)	.854* (.366)	1.514* (.615)
log likelihood	-236.2	-32.8	-129.7	-70.3
Pseudo R2	.623	.256	.317	.432
n	925	308	301	316

Notes: The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent voted for Han and 0 if for Chen.

Respondents who did not vote for either are excluded. Standard errors are in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ ;  $\hat{p} < .10$ .

Source: 2018 TEDS Kaohsiung mayoral post-election survey.

### **Attitudes toward the establishment**

At the heart of Han's populist rhetoric was the accusation that political elites had betrayed the common people. This was not necessarily just a partisan attack against the DPP establishment; we have seen that Han's rhetoric was often directed against political elites in general. This subsection looks at attitudes toward the establishment. One question tapped into this dissatisfaction with both parties. Respondents were asked, "Some people say, 'The two major parties in Taiwan do not understand what ordinary people demand.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?" People who strongly agreed were coded one, and all others were coded zero. Table 4, Model A shows that this variable is strongly correlated with a vote for Han. More specifically, while the coefficient is positive for all three groups, it is only significant among green camp identifiers.

An even more direct and dramatic way to look at the effect of Han's anti-elite appeal is to examine what his supporters thought about other KMT party elites. After all, Han occasionally singled them out personally for criticism. Do we see evidence that Han supporters responded to this attack on KMT party elites? As with Han, respondents were also asked on a scale of zero to ten how much they liked other prominent KMT party elites, former president Ma, KMT party chair Wu Den-yi, and 2016 KMT presidential candidate Eric Chu. Ma, Wu, and Chu can all be considered as elite establishment KMT politicians, so I take the average of their scores to obtain a measure of how much respondents liked elite KMT politicians. One might expect Han's voters to generally have positive evaluations of these figures. After all, they are all from the same party. In fact, Table 4, Model B shows that, after controlling for the other variables, the coefficient for Ma, Wu, and Chu is *negative* and significant. Specifically, this result is driven by green camp identifiers. That is, there was a group of voters who were not core KMT supporters and who did not like elite KMT

Table 4: Logit models populism and vote choice: anti-elite sentiment

Model	A: Neither party understands				B: Attitudes toward KMT elites			
	all	blue	neither	green	all	blue	neither	green
Constant	-.947 (.699)	.677 (2.062)	.359 (.914)	-6.249 (1.647)	-.286 (.735)	1.471 (2.136)	1.044 (.984)	-5.845* (1.714)
Blue camp party ID	1.486* (.378)				1.488* (.395)			
Green camp party ID	-2.244* (.262)				-2.323* (.271)			
National ID (1-7 scale)	-.343* (.097)	-.367 (.267*)	-.464* (.133)	-.070 (.208)	-.360* (.101)	-.466 (.289)	-.507* (.141)	-.018 (.215)
Liking Han (0-10 scale)	.655* (.065)	.659* (.192)	.559* (.080)	.849* (.132)	.739* (.083)	.627* (.257)	.615* (.105)	.981* (.157)
Neither party understands	.997* (.296)	.779 (1.142)	.475 (.383)	1.707* (.472)				
Like Ma, Wu, Chu (0-10 scale)					-.199* (.085)	.037 (.268)	-.153 (.121)	-.294* (.132)
log likelihood	-246.7	-34.7	-135.0	-72.1	-232.1	-31.5	-123.7	-72.7
Pseudo R2	.607	.214	.289	.418	.607	.217	.285	.362
n	925	308	301	316	873	295	279	299

Notes: The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent voted for Han and 0 if for Chen. Respondents who did not vote for either are excluded. Standard errors are in parentheses. \*  $p < .05$ ;  $\hat{p} < .10$ .

Source: 2018 TEDS Kaohsiung mayoral post-election survey.

politicians who nonetheless voted for Han.<sup>9</sup> This does not prove that those voters supported Han *because* he criticized the elite KMT politicians, but that is certainly one possible explanation. Admittedly, this is not a very strong result; including other variables in the model will reduce the coefficient to insignificance. However, the fact that there is a negative coefficient in *any* model is shocking.

Taken together, these two variables show that there was a clear undercurrent of anti-establishment sentiment among Han supporters, especially among non-traditional KMT voters.

### **Attitudes toward corruption**

A second way to look for evidence that voters felt betrayed by the political establishment is to look specifically at corruption. Two survey questions are relevant. First, respondents were asked, "Generally speaking, how serious do you think corruption among officials in Kaohsiung City is?" Second, they were asked, "How serious do you think the problem of elected mayors using public resources to help campaigns was in this election?" The first question is about corruption among civil servants rather than elected officials. However, it is reasonable to think that corruption among civil servants is more likely to flourish when the elected officials don't take corruption seriously. That is, this is an indirect measure of how lax establishment politicians are in guarding against corruption. The second question taps directly into Han's accusation that partisan conflicts over political power were at the root of Taiwan's economic decline. In the presidential election, Han would spell out this charge in detail by accusing Tsai of using government resources to help her political agenda in the Yang Hui-ju affair. In the mayoral race, the charge was less clearly defined but still present. Indeed, the TEDS data indicate there was a significant increase in concern about corruption between 2014 and 2018. In 2014, 30.0% thought

---

<sup>9</sup> A similar model with the 2014 data does not show this negative correlation between a vote for the KMT candidate and liking Ma. In fact, the coefficient is marginally positive. (Model not shown.) However, the variables in the 2014 and 2018 models are not exactly the same, so caution is required.

that corruption was serious and 25.1% thought that abuse of resources was serious. In 2018, these figures increased to 40.4% and 40.1%, respectively (Table 2). Keep in mind that there were no high-profile corruption cases in the first Tsai term before the 2018 election, either nationally or in Kaohsiung. Any surge in concern about corruption was far more likely to be driven by Han's rhetoric than by daily events.

In fact, Tables 5 show that, after controlling for the other variables, the first variable, corruption among civil servants, is positive but not significantly different from zero. In particular, the coefficient for blue camp identifiers is almost exactly zero, and it is slightly larger but still insignificant for the other two groups.<sup>10</sup> Concern about corruption among civil servants was not the main driver of votes for Han.

The second variable, whether mayors abused public resources to stay in power, has a much clearer effect. Respondent who thought this was a serious problem were more likely to vote for Han. The pattern was clearest among respondents who did not identify with either the blue or green camp.

These results suggest that concerns about corruption, especially high-level corruption for political purposes, were associated with support for Han. Of course, the causal direction remains unclear. We cannot be sure whether concerns about corruption led voters to support Han or whether voter who supported Han became more concerned about corruption. Nonetheless, there are definite echoes of Han's rhetoric in the survey data.

### **Attitudes toward Han's personal traits**

Populists are often attacked for promoting crude or unrealistic policy proposals. However, within the populist logic, whether a policy proposal is painstakingly thought out is far less important than whether voters believe that the populist cares first and foremost about the well-being of the people. Fundamentally, the argument is that the populist will be able to solve problems because he stands with the people.

---

<sup>10</sup> The coefficient for green camp identifiers does not quite reach conventional levels of significance ( $p=.117$ ).

**Table 5: Logit models of populism and vote choice: corruption**

Party ID	all	blue	neither	green
Constant	-1.406 <sup>^</sup> (.734)	-.157 (2.115)	-.407 (.986)	-6.230* (1.624)
Blue camp party ID	1.321* (.378)			
Green camp party ID	-2.195* (.260)			
National ID (1-7 scale)	-.294* (.100)	-.324 (.274)	-.385* (.139)	-.042 (.202)
Liking Han (0-10 scale)	.652* (.065)	.682* (.200)	.570* (.082)	.824* (.130)
City officials corrupt	.288 (.244)	.025 (.718)	.150 (.330)	.660 (.421)
Mayors abuse govt resources	.799* (.253)	1.279 <sup>^</sup> (.761)	.825* (.354)	.466 (.446)
log likelihood	-245.9	-33.3	-132.4	-76.7
Pseudo R2	.608	.244	.303	.380
n	925	308	301	316

Notes: The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent voted for Han and 0 if for Chen.

Respondents who did not vote for either are excluded. Standard errors are in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ ;  $\hat{p} < .10$ .

Source: 2018 TEDS Kaohsiung mayoral post-election survey.

In a nutshell, the populist relies on trust.

The TEDS survey asked which candidate was better on several qualities, including who best understand the people's needs and who was the most trustworthy. For each of these questions, I coded a variable as one if the respondent said Han was the best and zero otherwise.

Table 6 shows that these two variables are extremely powerful. Being thought of as understanding people's needs has a large, positive coefficient in all three groups, though it is only significant among neutral and green camp identifiers. Trustworthiness is even more potent. Being seen as the most trustworthy candidate has a very large, positive, and significant coefficient across all three subgroups. These two variables are unambiguously correlated with a decision to vote for Han.

**Table 6: Logit models of populism and vote choice: trustworthiness**

Party ID	all	blue	neither	green
Constant	-1.857* (.859)	-1.485 (2.420)	-1.198 (1.128)	-5.430* (1.834)
Blue camp party ID	1.077* (.430)			
Green camp party ID	-2.122* (.321)			
National ID (1-7 scale)	-.112 (.120)	-.166 (.310)	-.169 (.161)	.043 (.244)
Liking Han (0-10 scale)	.299* (.075)	.459^ (.238)	.243 (.094)	.379* (.154)
Best understands people	1.180* (.304)	1.273 (.938)	1.033* (.410)	1.431* (.540)

Party ID	all	blue	neither	green
Most Trustworthy	2.740* (.351)	2.645* (1.076)	2.894* (.506)	2.459* (.580)
log likelihood	-183.2	-24.8	-97.2	-60.1
Pseudo R2	.708	.438	.488	.515
n	925	308	301	613

Notes: The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent voted for Han and 0 if for Chen. Respondents who did not vote for either are excluded. Standard errors are in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ ;  $\hat{p} < .10$ .

Source: 2018 TEDS Kaohsiung mayoral post-election survey.

### **The substantive impact of populism**

I have argued that populist arguments were associated with a greater likelihood of voting for Han Kuo-yu, especially among voters who are not traditional KMT supporters. In this subsection, I look at how much difference the partisan variables made for predicted vote probabilities. In fact, the impacts are quite substantial.

Using the models in Tables 3-6, I calculate the predicted probability of voting for Han in different scenarios. In all of these comparisons, the national identity variable is set to a value of six, indicating a somewhat strong Taiwanese identity and respondents are assumed to like Han at five, the midpoint on the thermometer scale. For the models of all respondents, respondents are assumed to identify with neither the blue nor green camps. The results are shown in Table 7.

In the full models with all respondents, all five comparisons produced significant differences in the predicted probability of a vote for Han. Moreover, all of the differences are substantively quite large. The smallest gap is from Table 4, Model A (neither party understands ordinary people). Agreeing with this statement increases the likelihood of voting for Han from .567 to .781, an effect that any candidate would be thrilled to benefit from.

Table 7: Populist appeals and predicted probability of voting for Han

Party ID	all		blue		neither		green	
	pred. prob.	sig.						
<u>Perceptions of economy: economic development poor, youth must go north (Table 3)</u>								
Agree with neither	.286	*	.595		.348	*	.020	*
Agree with both	.753		.914		.731		.231	
<u>Attitudes toward the establishment: Neither party understands ordinary people (Table 4, Model A)</u>								
Don't agree	.567	*	.854		.591		.082	*
Agree	.781		.927		.699		.329	
<u>Attitudes toward the establishment: How much do you like Ma, Wu, and Chu? (Table 4, Model B)</u>								
0	.776	*	.859		.746		.260	*
10	.321		.898		.390		.018	
<u>Attitudes toward corruption: City officials corrupt, mayors abuse resources (Table 5)</u>								
Agree with neither	.523	*	.787		.534	*	.086	
Agree with both	.764		.931		.753		.225	
<u>Han's personal traits: Best understands people, most trustworthy (Table 6)</u>								
Han is not best at either	.263	*	.454	*	.269	*	.036	*
Han is best at both	.947		.977		.949		.648	

Notes: Predicted probabilities are calculated from Tables 3-6. Respondents are assumed to have a national ID score of 6 (somewhat strong Taiwanese ID), and liking Han at a level of 5. In the column for all respondents, respondents are assumed to not identify with either the blue or green camps. \* indicates that the 95% confidence intervals for the two estimates do not overlap.

Notably, the differences are less striking among blue camp party identifiers. In this group, the 95% confidence intervals overlap in four of the five comparisons. The only significant gap is for Han's personal traits. Among the two other groups, the impact of the populism variables is more powerful. The 95% confidence intervals only overlap in three of the ten comparisons, and each of the five comparisons is significantly higher in at least one of the two subpopulations. In short, the impact of the populism variables was particularly powerful among non-traditional KMT voters.

## **Conclusion**

This paper looks at the spectacular and unexpected rise of Han Kuo-yu in 2018 through the lens of his populist discourse. Han laid out his populist vision when he re-emerged in national politics in the 2017 KMT party chair election. In the two forums in that race, Han developed four main themes, that Taiwan had gradually declined from an initial prosperous state, that the ordinary people really just wanted material prosperity, that the elite establishment politicians were responsible for the economic decline due to their incessant power struggles and their distance from the common people, and that he would pursue common-sense policies to benefit the people. Han's rhetoric during the 2018 mayoral campaign closely followed this blueprint with only minor adjustments. I look for evidence that this populist discourse impacted public opinion in the 2018 election. Survey data shows that there are clear echoes of Han's rhetoric in public opinion. People who agreed with Han's populist arguments were likely to vote for him, even if they were not part of traditional KMT constituencies. In short, Han's populist appeal was crucial to his ability to win over new voters and his unlikely victory in the 2018 mayoral election.

This paper is an initial look at the impact of populism on Han's popularity, but there are a number of topics that have been left unexamined. Here, I briefly list some of the most obvious omissions. First, this paper briefly mentioned Han's defi-

inition of the common people but did not explore whether ordinary people saw themselves in that vision. Second, the relationship between Han's populist and Chinese nationalist appeals is unclear. Third, I was unable to carefully examine what voters thought of Han's policy proposals. Fourth and most importantly, this paper does not look at why Han's popularity evaporated during 2019. It is not clear whether Han's fall was due to voters' rejection of his populist arguments, his ethical problems, his poor performance as mayor, a renewed emphasis on Taiwan's relations with China, better performance by the DPP government, or something else. One possibility is that, because Han's populist argument was not founded on a deep, longstanding conflict between large social groups representing fundamentally different visions of the future, it simply was not potent enough to override the usual divisions based on questions about sovereignty, identity, and relations with China in the context of a national election. This paper only looks at the rise of Han's populism; a full picture also requires an understanding of the fall.

## References

- Achen, Christopher H. and T.Y. Wang, eds. 2017. *The Taiwan Voter*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Campbell, Angus et al. 1960. *The American Voter*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hawkins, Kirk. 2009. "Is Chavez Populist? Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Political Studies* 42 (8): 1040-1067.
- Hawkins, Kirk and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser. 2012. "The Ideational Approach to Populism." *Latin American Research Review* 52 (4): 513-528.
- Ho, Jeng-Sheng. 2020. "Populism and the 'Han Wave' Phenomenon." (in Chinese) *Journal of Development and Prospect*. 27: 93-111.
- Hu, Cheng-Kuang and Su-hui Chiang. 2020. "Populism in Taiwan: Han-Kuo-yu and His Supporters." (in Chinese) *Taiwan International Studies Quarterly* 16 (3): 155-183.
- Huang, Chi. 2014. Taiwan's Election and Democratization Study, 2012-2016 (III): the Survey of the Nine-in-One Local Elections, 2014 (TEDS2014). MOST 101-2420-H-004-034-MY4. (in Chinese) Taipei: Ministry of Science and Technology Research Project.
- Huang, Chi. 2018. Taiwan's Election and Democratization Study, 2016-2020 (III): the Survey of the Nine-in-One Local Elections, 2018 (TEDS2018). MOST 105-2420-H-004-015-SS4]. (in Chinese) Taipei: Ministry of Science and Technology Research Project.)
- Kenny, Paul. 2017. *Populism and Patronage: Why Populists Win Elections in India, Asia, and Beyond*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Moffitt, Benjamin and Simon Tormey. 2014. "Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatization and Political Style." *Political Studies* 62(2): 381-397.
- Mudde, Cas. 2017. "Populism: An Ideational Approach." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa

- Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mudde, Cas and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser. 2017. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Müller, Jans-Werner. 2016. *What is Populism?* New York: Penguin Books.
- Ostiguy, Pierre. 2017. "Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Roberts, Kenneth M. 2006. "Populism, Political Conflict, and Grass-Roots Organization in Latin America." *Comparative Politics* 38 (2): 127-148.
- Rummens, Stefan. 2017. "Populism as a Threat to Liberal Democracy." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stanley, Ben. 2008. "The thin ideology of populism." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13 (1): 95-110.
- Urbinati, Nadia. 2019. "Political Theory of Populism." *Annual Reviews of Political Science* 22(1): 111-127.
- Van Kessel, Stijn. 2014. "The populist cat-dog: applying the concept of populism to contemporary European party systems." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19 (1): 99-118.
- Weyland, Kurt. 2001. "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in Latin American Studies." *Comparative Politics* 34 (1): 1-22.
- Yu, Ching-hsin. 2017. "Parties, Partisans, and Independents in Taiwan." In *The Taiwan Voter*, eds. Christopher H. Achen and T.Y. Wang. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

**Appendix 1: Public forums cited in this paper**

<b>date</b>	<b>event</b>	<b>link</b>
2017.04.29	First KMT party chair forum	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nq0hUIaD_ds">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nq0hUIaD_ds</a> accessed Oct 13, 2020
2017.05.06	Second KMT party chair forum	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1hN0Bt8Ef8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1hN0Bt8Ef8</a> accessed Oct 13, 2020
2018.07.06	Luncheon, 85 Sky Tower	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIqI0mP9GO0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIqI0mP9GO0</a> accessed Oct 13, 2020
2018.10.10	Rally, Sanmin District	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRHFabvLczA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRHFabvLczA</a> accessed Oct 13, 2020
2018.10.26	Rally, Fengshan District	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASoM8UBhhpc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASoM8UBhhpc</a> accessed Oct 13, 2020
2018.11.08	Rally, Qishan District	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hm7N-YS9HX0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hm7N-YS9HX0</a> accessed Nov 26, 2020
2018.11.09	Kaohsiung mayoral debate	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpgubhXFCOo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpgubhXFCOo</a> accessed Nov 27, 2020
2018.11.14	Rally, Gangshan District	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kn_HHikjrQY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kn_HHikjrQY</a> accessed Nov 26, 2020
2018.11.17	Rally, Fengshan District	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8REbxBRXHQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8REbxBRXHQ</a> accessed Dec 25, 2020

**Appendix 2: Question Wordings of TEDS Survey Items Used in the Paper**

Year	Label(s) Used	Question Wording	Coding
2014	Dissat. w/ industrial, commercial dev.	Regarding industrial and commercial development, how satisfied are you?	1: very satisfied 2: somewhat satisfied 3: somewhat dissatisfied 4: very dissatisfied
2014	Liking Ma	What's your feeling toward Ma Ying-jeou?	0: dislike very much 10: like very much
2014	City officials corrupt	Generally speaking, how serious do you think corruption among officials in Kaohsiung City is?	1: very serious 2: serious 3: not very serious 4: not serious at all
2014	Mayors abuse govt resources	How serious do you think the problem of elected mayors using public resources to help campaigns was in this election?	1: very serious 2: serious 3: not very serious 4: not serious at all
2014	Understand people	In this Kaohsiung City mayoral election, which candidate best understood the people's needs?	3: Yang Chiu-hsing
2014	Trustworthy	In this Kaohsiung City mayoral election, which candidate was the most trustworthy?	3: Yang Chiu-hsing
2018	Blue camp party ID, Neither blue nor green camp party ID, Green camp party ID	Among the main political parties in our country, including the KMT, DPP, PFP, NP, TSU, and New Power Party, do you think of yourself as leaning toward any particular party? [follow-up] Which party is that?	<b>Blue camp parties</b> 1: KMT 3: NP 4: PFP <b>Green camp parties</b> 2: DPP 6: TSU 11: New Power Party

Year	Label(s) Used	Question Wording	Coding
2018	National ID	<p>In Taiwan, some people think they are Taiwanese. There are also some people who think that they are Chinese. Do you consider yourself as Taiwanese, Chinese, or both?</p> <p>[if Taiwanese or Chinese, ask] Do you feel very strongly or somewhat strongly that you are Taiwanese/Chinese?</p> <p>[if both, ask] Do you feel yourself leaning a little more to considering yourself Taiwanese or Chinese?</p>	<p>1: very strong Chinese ID</p> <p>2: somewhat strong Chinese ID</p> <p>3: both, leans Chinese</p> <p>4: both, no lean</p> <p>5: both, leans Taiwanese</p> <p>6: somewhat strong Taiwanese ID</p> <p>7: very strong Taiwanese ID</p>
2018	Economic development poor	How satisfied are you with the overall economic development of Kaohsiung City?	<p>1: very satisfied</p> <p>2: somewhat satisfied</p> <p>3: somewhat dissatisfied</p> <p>4: very dissatisfied</p>
2018	Youth must go north	Some people say: 'The outflow of young population will affect the development of Kaohsiung City.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	<p>1: strongly agree</p> <p>2: agree</p> <p>3: disagree</p> <p>4: strongly disagree</p>
2018	Neither party understands	Some people say, 'The two major parties in Taiwan do not understand what ordinary people demand.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	<p>1: strongly agree</p> <p>2: agree</p> <p>3: disagree</p> <p>4: strongly disagree</p>

Year	Label(s) Used	Question Wording	Coding
2018	Liking Ma, Wu, Chu	What's your feeling toward Ma Ying-jeou? What's your feeling toward Wu Tun-yi? What's your feeling toward Chu Lil-luan?	0: dislike very much 10: like very much
2018	City officials corrupt	Generally speaking, how serious do you think corruption among officials in Kaohsiung City is?	1: very serious 2: serious 3: not very serious 4: not serious at all
2018	Mayors abuse govt resources	How serious do you think the problem of elected mayors using public resources to help campaigns was in this election?	1: very serious 2: serious 3: not very serious 4: not serious at all
2018	Best understands people	In this Kaohsiung City mayoral election, which candidate best understood the people's needs?	1: Han Kuo-yu
2018	Most Trustworthy	In this Kaohsiung City mayoral election, which candidate was the most trustworthy?	1: Han Kuo-yu

Source: TEDS official website ([teds.nccu.edu.tw](http://teds.nccu.edu.tw)).

# 韓國瑜民粹論述對2018年高雄市長選舉的影響

鮑彤\*

## 《摘要》

韓國瑜如何從不被矚目的政治人物，變成高雄市長然後成為國民黨總統候選人？本文指出，韓國瑜「韓流」崛起乃基於民粹主義訴求，他向選民傳達主要訊息是，老百姓生活應過得比現在更好，但政治菁英從過去到現在一直都口惠不實、未代表一般基層人民真正利益。本文梳理韓國瑜在2017年競選國民黨黨主席時完整辯論主張，及其2018年競選高雄市長時修辭說法，並深度檢視他這兩次選舉所發表的相關聲明，先後一貫呈現出來的民粹論述。接著，本文探討2018年高雄市長選舉的TEDS選後面訪民調數據，發現受訪者確實附和了韓國瑜相關民粹論調，即使在非傳統國民黨選民中，認同韓國瑜說法和投票給他者呈正相關，意即韓國瑜民粹說辭對其擴大支持度及能在高雄拿下原本不太可能的勝選，扮演重要角色。

**關鍵詞：**民粹主義、韓國瑜、高雄市長選舉、競選論述

---

\* 中央研究院政治所與國立政治大學選舉研究中心副研究員。

