

Taiwan's Democratic Institutions: The Electoral Rise and Recall of Kuomintang's Han Kuo-yu Mayor

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Abstract—The results of Taiwan's presidential election, which took place on 11 January 2020, were alarming for the Kuomintang (KMT). A party that was once the pillar of Taiwan's institutional apparatus is now losing its direction. Since 2016, the inability of KMT to construct a winning presidential election campaign strategy has made its Chinese ancestry an obstacle in Taiwan's vibrant and transparent democracy. The appearance of the little-known legislator Han Kuo-yu as the leadership alternative opened the possibility of reigniting the party. Han's victory in the Kaohsiung mayoral election in November 2018 provided hope that Han could also win the presidency. Wrongly described as a populist, Han, however, was defeated in the January 2020 presidential race. This article analyses why Han is not a populist, his triumph in Kaohsiung, humiliation in running for the presidency and suffering a complete 'loss of face' when Kaohsiungers democratically ousted him from the mayoral post on 6 June 2020.

Keywords—Populism, '1992 Consensus', Taiwan, youth vote, Han's recall.

I. INTRODUCTION

ON 24 November 2018, there was a chance that a Kaohsiung KMT mayoral candidate could oust a pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) mayor. The DPP had dominated the city politically for two decades. In December 2006, Ms. Chen Chu, a former dissident who was imprisoned for six years during Taiwan's martial law period, succeeded in keeping Kaohsiung under DPP control. In November 2014, Chen also managed to keep her mayoral post by obtaining the support of 68.09% of Kaohsiung's electorate. Nevertheless, in April 2018, seven months before ending her third term, Chen decided to quit her job to become President Tsai Ing-wen's top aide, secretary-general, in Taipei. Chen is known as an astute campaigner and veteran politician. Tsai decided to carry out controversial reforms, and Chen's task was to assist the president during these challenging times for the government.

According to the TVBS polls, after two years of Tsai's first administration, only 26% of the population was satisfied with her performance [1]. During the same period, Formosa polls also noted that only 23.5% of the population was satisfied with Tsai's government [2]. Decisions including pension cuts, the loss of diplomatic allies, the failure to legalise same-sex marriage, and so on, influenced Tsai's overall popularity. Due to her worrisome popularity levels and an urgent call to rejuvenate Tsai's political persona, as well as the DPP losing connection with the electorate in general, Chen was asked to

take the top aide secretary-general position. In her book, the former Kaohsiung mayor stressed that President Tsai has an academic rather than a political background. For this reason, Tsai has limited connections inside the party [3]. Tsai is trying to strengthen her influence and comradeship with different DPP factions, and Chen has the party connections that Tsai needs.

An understanding of these events and this context is vital for the overall analysis of this article, as they encapsulate the political landscape that helped the unknown and ostensibly 'populist' [4]-[7]. KMT mayoral candidate Han Kuo-yu win the Kaohsiung mayoral election in November 2018. This article explains why it is inaccurate to categorise Han as a populist. The article also discusses the political build-up and enchantment that helped Han win the November 2018 Kaohsiung mayoral race and why he failed to defeat Tsai's presidential re-election bid in January 2020. These elements will be presented in this article. However, the main contribution of this article to the literature is its discussion regarding the attempts of dissatisfied Kaohsiung voters to recall Han after he announced his intention, shortly after being elected Kaohsiung mayor, to run for the presidency. Additionally, this article discusses Han's failure to keep his post after the recall took place on 6 June 2020, the significance of Han's downfall for the KMT, and what can be construed from these alterations in this vibrant and fully-fledged Asian democracy.

First, the concept of populism and Ernesto Laclau's theoretical definition will be outlined in this article. This discussion will be followed by an analysis of the televised speech the little-known Han used as he was competing for KMT's chairmanship in 2017 and how that type of promising rhetoric was used during his Kaohsiung mayoral campaign and victory. The next section discusses Han's decision to run for the presidency shortly after being elected mayor and the disappointment and anger this caused amongst Kaohsiung voters. Against this backdrop, the article discusses how the idea of recalling mayor Han was constructed, the different movements promoting the 'recall' and what type of narratives these key leaders articulated. An analysis of the recall build-up and Han's defeat will be presented in the last section, which concludes by examining what can be derived from these political circumstances.

Regarding the methodological tools employed in this article, from March to June 2020, interviews of key 'Recall' leaders of the organisations *Citizens Wowing Action* as well as *We Care Kaohsiung* were conducted. Leaders from the political parties *State Building Party* and the *New Power Party* were also

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interviewed. Popularity polls and electoral results will also be used in this analysis. Furthermore, Han's speeches and debates were obtained from internet sources and are cited and analysed. To conclude, non-participant observations of the anti-Han campaigning in Kaohsiung County that occurred shortly before Saturday, 6 June—known as the '0606 2020 Recall'—will be presented.

II. CONTEXTUALISING POPULISM

The concept of populism is a political phenomenon that appears in a wide range of dissimilar settings throughout the world. According to Taggart, populism as an unusual concept that is essentially intangible with “an awkward conceptual slipperiness. For different sets of people, it veers between having great meaning and fundamental vacuousness” [8, p.1]. Hawkins claims that “populism is a set of fundamental beliefs about the nature of the political world—a worldview or, to use a more rarefied term, a ‘discourse’—that perceives history as a Manichaeic struggle between Good and Evil, one in which the side of Good is the ‘will of the people’” [9, p.5]. Note that democracy and populism are intimately interlinked. Populism can be understood as an “effective reminder that democracy is not a given but is instead a constant enterprise of adjustments to the changing needs and values of society” [10, pp.16, 17].

The Taiwanese theorist Hwang Kwang-Kuo sees populism as a practice that mobilises and stirs up the masses. Normally, a populist leader regularly appeals to the people with a discourse that emotionally divides the population [11, p.57]. According to his ‘Face-Favour’ Confucianism Chinese theoretical model focuses on two levels of analysis, social exchange behaviour and language, and explains the Taiwanese-populist phenomenon, which is based on the implementation of a ‘Western model’ of democracy that clashes with its Asian cultural context [12, pp.31-50].

Hawkins points out that “every manifestation of populism criticises the existence of powerful minorities, which in one way or another are obstructing the will of the common people” [9, p.8]. Based on previous research [13], it is considered Ernesto Laclau's theory of populism as the most theoretical explanatory framework for defining the context in which Taiwan has experienced populist politics.

To determine the degree to which the situation in Taiwan involves instances of populist politics, Laclau suggests [14, p.37] that we must first examine whether we can identify different ‘units’—which means groups, organisations, neighbourhoods, communities, and even party factions that have different unsatisfied demands against a common enemy. In spite of their differences, some kind of solidarity between them emerges because they share the negative element that their (different) demands remain unsatisfied. This is the first precondition. This sense of commonality among different units is exactly the meaning of the *logic of equivalence*. Regardless of their differential nature, these demands “tend to re-aggregate themselves to form an *equivalential chain*” [14, p.37]. This new formation acts as an inducing factor for a wide range of subjects in a society, as it is structured with the equivalential aggregation of a plurality of democratic demands. In other words, all these

different particularistic demands are subordinated to construct a collective demand. This demand is called the *popular subject*. We must recognize that there is no emergence of popular subjectivity without the creation of an internal frontier. In this way, equivalential popular discourses divide society (the people) into two camps: the powerful against the underdog. Therefore, we are no longer dealing with different unfulfilled demands but a “fighting demand”. Against this background, Laclau argues that with “equivalences, popular subjectivity, dichotomic construction of the social around an internal frontier, we have all the structural features to define populism” [14, p.38].

The purpose of creating an internal frontier and the equivalential chain using a variety of unfulfilled demands is to realise the potential of “an anti-institutional character” by subverting the “particularistic, differential character of the demands.” The prime feature of the “equivalential chain is to create a frontier within the social and it is necessary to represent the other side of the frontier” [14, pp.38, 39]. In other words, an “Us-Them” axis. Laclau argues that “there is no populism without discursive construction of an enemy: the *ancient regime*, the oligarchy, the establishment or whatever” [14, pp.38-39]. This is precisely what Laclau means as the other side of the frontier: an enemy oppressor, a regime held responsible for their misfortunes. Accepting that representation of their particular demands cannot be entirely realised temporarily solves this problem. “This process by which a particular demand comes to represent an equivalential chain incommensurable with it is, of course, what we have called *hegemony*” [14, p.39].

In the following sections, these theoretical terms will be revisited to examine the emergence of the Han Kuo-yu phenomenon. Previous political policies and campaigning strategies during Chen Shui-bian's administration (2000-2008) will be noted to contrast what can be categorised as populist politics.

III. HAN KUO-YU: EMERGING AS A LEADERSHIP CONTENDER

Han was not well known before deciding to compete in the ‘KMT Chairmanship’ election. There were six candidates running in the chairmanship race, and on 29th April 2017, the candidates participated in the first televised debate. To gain insight into Han's discursive speech, it is vital to examine the type of symbolic meaning Han articulates in his rhetorical message. During the first debate [15], Han stated the following:

When I was young... Taiwan was the leader of the Four Asian Tigers. We are behind other Asian countries now ... Our country is sick ... former President Chiang-Ching-Kuo [1978-1988] built the Ten Major Construction Projects ... However, now, Taiwan's young generation can't even find decent jobs.

By recollecting how progressive and confident Taiwan was during the KMT's Republic of China and one-party rule period and indirectly implying that there were opportunities for young people during that capitalist-led industrialisation phase, it is circuitously suggested that Taiwan has since underperformed vis-à-vis other East Asian countries, thus affecting the future of

young Taiwanese individuals. Han continued, stating that,

For the past twenty years, Taiwan has been governed by three presidents. What have they done for Taiwan's industry? Only the Hsinchu Science Park. This is pathetic! These presidents are partly responsible for the corruption that has occurred in Taiwan.

Han implied that since 2000, democratically elected presidents (including Ma Ing-Yeou's 2008-16 administrations) have hindered and therefore failed to continue Taiwan's industrial advancement. What is also revealing is that Han added corruption to the narrative about the presidents' responsibility. Han's description of the incumbent's electoral support and democratic practices in Taiwan are also worth repeating here:

President Tsai has to recognise that people didn't vote for her but the DPP ticket. Some people truly hate the KMT. Others are simply hoping for a better future. Democracy only works on Presidential Election Day. After that, Taiwanese are powerless.

Some individuals in the DPP electoral base have a longstanding animosity toward the KMT. Regardless of the selected presidential candidate, they are unconditional DPP voters. For the KMT, however, the voters who need to be persuaded are those 'hoping for a better future'. These swing voters are attracted by promises of economic prosperity. Nonetheless, during Ma's administration, economic growth policies were interpreted as too reliant on trade agreements with Mainland China [16], [17]. Those sectors certainly opted not to support the KMT again. Han's description of the democratic principles in Taiwan, however, is also dubious. This will be elaborated in the final section of this paper.

In relation to the economy, as ideological left-right dimensions are not part of Taiwanese politics but are identity questions [18], the KMT's electoral appeal is its business-oriented outlook and prioritization of economic growth if elected [19]. On this basis, as a common and national concern, the economy provides the KMT with an effective campaigning narrative to use to convince swing voters.

On 6 May 2017, the second and final televised debate took place [20]. Han emphasised how hard life is for many Taiwanese people by stating the following: 'Why is earning so difficult now? ...We cannot be proud of our economy or our political system. Poverty is the root of all crimes.' Part of Han's rhetorical style is to link the 'poor economy' theme with the struggle young Taiwanese people are facing:

Our young people don't have a bright future. Young people in Taipei, Taichung, Kaohsiung only get NTD \$30,000 - NTD \$35,000 per month. They are doomed. They are poor. It's so hard to buy property - even without having a baby. We're in real danger. The fight between the blue versus the green camp has to be resolved.

By including the average income of young Taiwanese people, Han was trying to give the impression that he is in touch with common people and conscious of the limitations they endure. What is also crucial in this quote is Han's effort to depict himself as the arbitrator who could reconcile political differences between the pro-reunification and pro-

independence camps. He also implied that Taiwan's low economic growth was due to political differences. To put it differently, he was not inciting divisive and dichotomous populist politics. Nevertheless, Han concluded by emphasising the KMT's core position:

We defend the Republic of China; we oppose Taiwan's independence. If elected KMT's Chairman, I will inform the people of Taiwan ... that after so many years, I believe that Taiwan's independence is worse than syphilis. Syphilis will kill your wife and children; Taiwan's independence will kill 23 million Chinese ... On the basis of the '1992 Consensus', we have made every effort in constructing external relations with the Republic of China.

To comply with the party's protocol, Han attempts to not distance himself from the KMT's Chinese hereditary configuration. What is also revealing is how—in relation to identity—Han described Taiwan's 23 million inhabitants as Chinese nationals. Indirectly, the significance of this message is quite the opposite of populist articulations. These are instead rejections of the voice and identity formation of millions of Taiwanese people who have electorally endorsed parties that articulate pro-independence narratives. This message reverses the identity search—i.e., materialises 'Taiwanese Consciousness'—via democratic practices in this vibrant Asian society, which began to crystallise when a non-KMT candidate won the 2000 presidential elections. For example, according to the surveys conducted by the 'Election Study Center National Chengchi University', 67% identified themselves as Taiwanese [21].

The chairmanship election was held on 20 May 2017. With 52.24% of the vote, Taiwan's Former Vice President (2012-16) Wu Den-yih was elected. Han finished fourth with 16,141 votes (5.84%). He was obviously not a serious contender. Nonetheless, it gave him the opportunity to be in the limelight for his next electoral race, which was the Kaohsiung mayoral campaign.

Before presenting the discussion in the next section, it is important to shed further light on the references to 'economy', 'youth' and 'corruption' that are prominent in Han's televised debates. In relation to Taiwan's economy, Lee Zong-rong and Lin Thing-hong offer a convincing explanation. The decades when Taiwan was known as one of Asia's Four Tigers are far in the past. Lee and Lin [22, pp.8, 9] claim that government policies to stimulate the economy have weakened companies and led to a paradigm shift in Taiwan from a 'miracle model' to a 'recession model'. A large part of Taiwan's economic activity occurs overseas. However, removing this "life support" from the supply chain could lead to total collapse. Apparently, 'this "artificial life support economy" has been maintained for approximately 15 years' [22, pp.8, 9]. Lee and Lin note that only a few Taiwanese businesses have actually stayed behind and truly contributed to the domestic economy [22, p.19].

Han argues that the policies of the last three Taiwanese presidents have caused this 'miracle model'-to-'recession model' paradigm shift. The dilemma, however, is that for the technology industry (e.g., Hsinchu Science Park) to flourish there must be a sustainable workforce with advanced

engineering skills. This setback is not solely political; many of Taiwan's young generation do not have the 'right education' to aspire to better salaries and career prospects [23].

After examining election advertisements, Fell [24] identified that since the early 1990s, corruption in political discourse has been the most stressed issue in election advertising. The use of political corruption cases and scandals has not declined during the 2000s. According to Fell, the corruption narrative was controlled by the DPP since the early 1990s. However, given President Chen's corruption scandals, in 2005, the KMT also began to exploit that narrative. Ownership of political corruption in the campaign narrative switched back again when the DPP highlighted a series of KMT corruption cases during Ma's second term [24]. Han's observation that presidents from both parties are partly responsible because political corruption occurred during their administrations correlates with Fell's findings.

From a theoretical populist point of view, as Laclau notes [14, p.39], 'the establishment, regime or oppressor' are what the KMT's authoritarian rule signifies for many Taiwanese. The KMT's historical, cultural and institutional baggage—combined with its warmer relations with Beijing—adds more essential elements with which to construct populist politics with an anti-KMT equivalential chain.¹ It is argued that the classification of Han as a populist—due to his unusual leadership style and discourse—is a misapplication of this concept. As a mayoral candidate in 2018, Han attempted to end DPP's dominance in Kaohsiung, which had lasted for two decades. The appearance of an unknown KMT figure—promising change—attracted much attention and support.

IV. PROMISES OF HAN

After Han's May 2017 chairmanship defeat, he was appointed KMT's Kaohsiung Chapter Director. After a year of serving in this position, the party nominated him to represent the party in the Kaohsiung mayoral elections. The chances of defeating the DPP in Kaohsiung were slim. In this section, the key factors that helped Han effectively persuade Kaohsiung's electorate. On 11 July 2018, Han delivered a speech that is worth analysing:

During the day, I studied and worked part time at university. At night, I rode my wild wolf motorcycle. Every Saturday I worked to earn extra money, and on Sundays, I hung out with some chicks ... when I was 18-19 years old, life was very hard, but we were very happy ... our Ten Major Construction Projects had already been completed.

Han tried to convey his humble past and cheerful attitude toward life. He provided reassurance, as an ordinary man, of a promising future for everyone. Like the televised chairmanship

¹ For the 2004 presidential elections, the DPP articulated a clear message to the nation: to reflect on their horrific past, end the authoritarian structure that forced people to identify themselves as Chinese, defend their land, and protect Taiwan from the evil pro-unification Mainlanders. In other words, the DPP openly declared who/what is perceived as the enemy of Taiwan (i.e., Laclau's other side of the frontier—the "Us-Them" axis). This was a radical campaign strategy that managed to crystallise the meaning of 'Taiwanese consciousness'. By reviving and re-interpreting previously suppressed emotions, the DPP

debate, Han nostalgically reminisced about the ROC's inspiring developmental period. Han continued,

The Republic of China was thriving. We had a great future ahead. We were the best of the Four Asian Dragons ... No one looked down on us ... But now, why has our country become like this? What's the future of Kaohsiung?

Without adding the names of elected presidents, Han is once again repeating the same rhetoric, implying that during the KMT's one-party rule, Taiwan had a future and was widely respected. However, now Taiwan, and in particular, Kaohsiung, has little hope. Focusing upon the mayoral campaigning, Han argued that,

In Kaohsiung, I haven't seen an industry that is confident and has a future. The tourism industry is also appalling. Kaohsiung should be Taiwan's richest city ... I'm very emotional...the south must be Taiwan's most prosperous place. I feel really sorry for the next generation.

Similar to the 29 April 2017 televised chairmanship debate, Han was trying to gain electoral capital by emphasising that the 'industry' in Kaohsiung has no future. Han added,

The DPP has ruled Kaohsiung for 20 years. This is enough ... Now Kaohsiung has no direction. We have to choose a mayor that can give Kaohsiung a better life; the people of Kaohsiung must be smarter, otherwise the future is so alarming ... We keep losing talent ... We must encourage companies to invest in Kaohsiung ... This is unfair. The DPP has lost its focus.

Han placed blame on the 20 years of DPP mayoral administration. He proposed a way out of this stagnant, dead-end situation by offering a better outcome to the city under a KMT mayor. Han went to say that,

Everyone is waiting for change and a fresh Kaohsiung. Please invite your friends to vote for a good mayor. I don't know how I can do it ... I'll try to get the industry to make the city thrive again. Companies will invest in this new generation ... Our young people will be able to go back to work and with their new families cultivate the next generation ... The old and poor Kaohsiung must be transformed into a vibrant and rich one... everyone must try and change the fate of Kaohsiung and welcome a bright future, thank you [25].

Han promised change and hope but acknowledged that he did not know how to effect these changes. The idea of encouraging companies to invest in Kaohsiung and create training opportunities—so poorly paid young Kaohsiungers could return home—was the change many hoped for. Many swing voters found Han's promise very attractive.

Han employed similar narratives in the KMT chairmanship

apparatus successfully mobilised Taiwan's popular base at the national level. The level of confrontation between two divided (reunification or independence) camps was so intense that class-based differences became irrelevant. President Chen demonized his political adversaries, calling them "Chinese Pigs," "Selling Taiwan Conglomerate," "Supporters of unification under the Big China ideology," "Fellow traveller of Communist China," and "Taiwan betrayers", see [11, p.53].

and Kaohsiung mayoral campaigns. Against this backdrop, the structural prerequisites for the rise and crystallisation of populist politics hardly exist. First, Han attempted to reminiscently contrast the KMT's one-party capitalist developmental period with the unproductive and corrupt aftermath of democratically elected administrations. If anything, Han was trying to invoke nostalgia to resurrect the hope and joint prosperity ROC citizens experienced four decades ago. From a populist theoretical viewpoint, there is no popular subjectivity or dichotomic construction in this discursive formula. Han indirectly rejected the little progress democratic practices have contributed to Taiwan's development during the 21st century. For example, the construction and galvanisation of 'Taiwanese Consciousness' in Taiwan's societal fabric has no significance for a KMT proxy.

Second, as an opposition candidate, Han's strategy to focus on Kaohsiung's stagnated industry—as a vehicle to promulgate a fresh economic start to the city if elected—is a common KMT opposition campaigning tactic. Han directly tried to underline the difficulties Taiwan's Millennials and Generation Zers face [26], [23], such as being forced to leave Kaohsiung in search of job opportunities in northern Taiwan.

Third, as Fell rightly noted [24], the national identity is a highly polarised narrative in Taiwanese politics: Taiwan's independence versus unification. It is argued that for populist practices to emerge and galvanise, an "Us-Them" axis camp must be temporarily assembled (Laclau's 'equivalential chain') with a politically divisive 'fighting demand' symbol. Nevertheless, as in the chairmanship speech, Han decided not to address identity in his mayoral campaign. He avoided using the term '1992 Consensus', making the derogatory remark that independence is worse than syphilis and choosing 'Chinese' rather 'Taiwanese' to describe the identity of Taiwan's 23 million inhabitants. Had he done so, it would have been political suicide. Kaohsiung is considered a domain of the independence-leaning Green camp. In other words, it would have particularly excluded those crucial pro-Green swing voters Han was trying to persuade.

It was unexpected to observe and hear a KMT candidate use a folkloric style to connect with the Kaohsiung electorate. Many disgruntled voters were persuaded and thus contributed to the expansion of the 'Han Wave'. Every politician must be popular and utilise any tools available to be seen as a different, honest, trustworthy and charismatic political leader. As a candidate, Han satisfied these criteria. Nonetheless, he failed to create a dichotomic terrain where a fighting demand was laid out against a common enemy. That is because, without officially divorcing from its Chinese ancestry, the KMT as a political party does not have the footing to reap the electoral fruits that populist practices could bring to a political campaign in Taiwan.

From the end of June until three weeks before the election, which was held on 24 November 2018, the results of the TVBS polling centre captured how Han's campaign was gaining momentum against Chen Chi-mai's (DPP) initial majority. As Han targeted young voters in his campaign, it is worth paying attention to the age group of 20-29 years old in the lines (1&2)

in Fig. 1. To show a contrast with the other end of the polling spectrum, lines 3 and 4 represent the age group of 60+ years old.

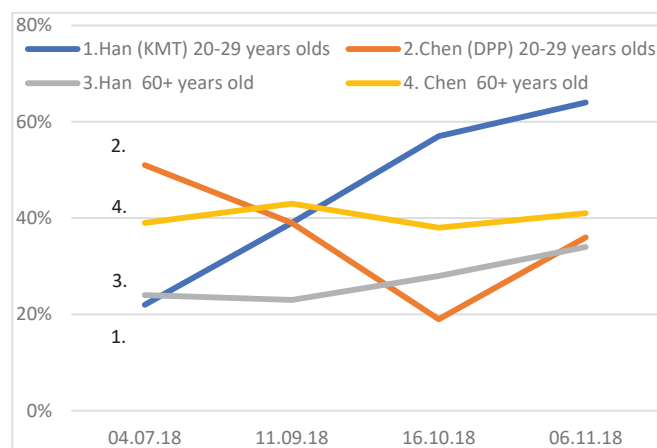


Fig. 1 Polls (20-29 years and 60+ years old) in Kaohsiung's mayoral race [27], [28]

On 4 July, only 22% of young voters supported Han. By November 2018, that number had more than doubled to 64% (line 1). With 51%, Chen began with a comfortable majority. Three weeks before Election Day, however, that number dropped to 36% (line 2). The changes in the 60+ year old age group did not fluctuate much. From 24% at the beginning of July, Han's support increased to 34% in November (line 3). There was also an increase in Chen's support among that age group. From 39% in July, his support slightly improved to 41% in November (line 4). Two points can be deduced from these TVBS poll results: 1) Younger voters were more persuaded by the candidates' 'economic growth' campaign rhetoric and therefore are better defined as 'swing voters'. In general, as there were no direct personal grievances against the KMT during its one-party authoritarian rule, a 'protest vote' against an unproductive DPP incumbent is also more plausible. 2) Older voters, however, persisted more in their partisan affiliation. This is because for pro-independence voters, partisanship is a deep-seated identity subject. Additionally, some sectors of the population received little (if any) benefits from the KMT's structural apparatus. Holding lasting antagonistic sentiments against those Chinese rulers is inevitable.

TABLE I
 KAOHSIUNG 2014 AND 2018 MAYORAL ELECTION RESULTS [29]-[32]

Year	KMT	Voters (%)	DPP	Voters (%)
2014	450,647	30.89	993,300	68.09
2018	892,545	53.87	742,239	44.80

On 6 November 2018, the last TVBS poll estimated that Han would receive the support of a total of 48% of the voters compared to 38% for Chen. The final results on 24 November 2018 were higher for both candidates. With 53.87% (892,545) of the votes, Han won the mayoral election. Both candidates received approximately 5-6% more votes than what the last

TVBS poll estimated. To demonstrate the import of Han's mayoral victory in a DPP stronghold, it is worth comparing the 2014 results with the 2018 results.

Han managed to add 542,653 more votes than KMT's 2014 mayoral candidate but also a majority of 150,306 votes. Han's victory consisted of a mix of 'swing' and 'protest' votes. Han's triumph, however, was not fundamentally based on his promises. Of Taiwan's 22 local and city governments, the DPP only won six (from 13 won in 2014). The KMT won in seven city governments previously held by the DPP. In other words, these results highlighted people's dissatisfaction with Tsai's administration and the DPP in general. As discussed earlier, in April 2018, Chen Chu quit her Kaohsiung mayor post to improve Tsai's low popularity levels. That was a clear sign that unless the political terrain changed, Tsai's January 2020 presidential re-election bid was also going to end in defeat.

V. HAN THE MAYOR OF KAOHSIUNG: A 'ONE-HIT WONDER' POLITICIAN

Han promised to transform the old and poor Kaohsiung into a young, rich, vibrant city. The essence of this promise was to begin a new phase where opportunities to grow and prosper would have been within the people's reach. Any astute political campaigner identifies these expectations and incites these sentiments in his/her discourse. That is, they touch people's hearts and minds. After a 20-year period of DPP rule, people wanted change. It is argued that opposition campaigning is different than incumbent campaigning, and these differences need to be fleshed out when a leader is described as a populist.

As part of his plan to reignite Kaohsiung's economy, promoting a friendlier approach with Beijing was vital. Han's decision to travel to Hong Kong on 22 March 2019—where Han met with Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam and Wang Zhimin, the director of Beijing's liaison office in Hong Kong—was a political mistake. Apart from forming trade agreements between the cities, it is said that this trip could have helped promote the 'one country, two systems' framework [33]. As he did during the televised chairmanship debate, in Hong Kong, Han openly expressed his support for One China, with Different Interpretations, known as the '1992 Consensus'. It is plausible that in private, Han also compared Taiwan's independence to syphilis. Sharing some form of a common understanding of what the 'one country, two systems' framework entails must have been a key topic in their amicable discussions. However, many Kaohsiung Han voters might have received this news rather negatively. People started to regret voting for Han.

During a debate in Kaohsiung's Legislative Assembly held on 3 May 2019, Ms. Huang Jie, a 26-year-old Councillor representing the Fonghan district, questioned Mayor Han's economic plans. Han responded that 'Kaohsiung wants to get rich. Alright?' Rolling her eyes, Jie replied:

Oh my God! Mayor, yes, we all want to make a fortune.

However, what are the details? What kind of strategies are you working on? What restrictions are there? This is the time to announce it; you have to tell us now! It is not as simple as saying, 'Kaohsiung wants to make a fortune'.

You have to convince the people.

Han insisted once again that the objective was for everyone 'to make a fortune in Kaohsiung'. Jien reiterated that a specific plan was expected from him. Irritated that a young Kaohsiung woman—35 years younger than he was—was challenging and cross-examining him, which implied that he was losing face, Han said,

The 'Taiwan Free Economic Pilot Zone' [34] is one of them, okay? Thank you.

Jien continued by asking, 'Mayor, do you truly understand what the 'Taiwan Free Economic Pilot Zone' means?' Furious and shocked that Jien continued her questioning, Han decided to ignore her [35]. Han was left looking unprepared and outflanked by a 26-year-old female newcomer. In an interview [36], Jien stated,

That day, Han failed to provide us any details of his economic programme. He constantly kept saying 'make a fortune'. We truly started to doubt his ability and therefore wondered if he was qualified for the mayoral position. Does this man have the credentials to lead and manage the city?

In addition to this shameful encounter in Kaohsiung's Legislative Assembly on 3 May 2019, which further harmed Han's reputation as it went viral and was widely discussed in the news and social media, there were rumours that Han was considering abandoning his mayoral post to run for the presidency. To clarify his position, on 22 April 2019, Han announced that due to the current circumstances (obligations with the citizens of Kaohsiung), he could not run in the 2020 presidential election [37]. On 17 May 2019, 25 days after reassuring the electorate that he only wanted to 'fulfil his promise' as Kaohsiung's Mayor, Han announced that he had accepted (saying, 'yes I do' in English) the request of KMT leaders to run for the presidency [38]. Terry Guo, the founder and head of *Foxconn* (the world's largest contract manufacturer of electronics), was Han's nearest KMT presidential primary rival.

On 15 July, with the support of 44.80% of KMT members, Han comfortably won the KMT's presidential primaries. Guo came in second with 27.73% of the votes. Many people in Kaohsiung felt that Han betrayed them. His personal political ambition—mixed with the KMT's lack of leadership and desire to replicate the 'Han Wave' nationwide—was more significant than the trust built with Kaohsiung voters.

Han's campaign was primarily centred upon the symbolisation of the ROC flag and thereby its connection with the 'Chinese Consciousness' the KMT institutionally constructed in Taiwan. The typification of the KMT as a political party in a fully-fledged democratic system appeared to be absent. There seemed to be no recognition that in a democratic context, party campaign slogans and party logos should not be national symbols. From a campaigning perspective, the idea was to cause voters to reminisce about the ROC. Specifically, the campaign wanted voters to recollect the KMT's one-party rule period and the nostalgic promise to resurrect Taiwan's 'miracle model' era. Han's emphasis on the 'Ten Major Construction Projects' in previous speeches

embodied this logic. Nevertheless, this overuse of national symbols and the consequent linking with Taiwan’s authoritarian past indirectly excluded those voters who advocated for ‘Taiwanese Consciousness’ and disliked Taiwan’s relationship with China in a broader context. This ethnographic observation resonates with the ‘structural politicisation’ argument [39]. The argument consists of the KMT one-party state mechanisms, which were not dismantled during the post-democratic transition. The KMT’s lack of leadership—combined with the DPP’s ability to gradually penetrate and challenge those legacy obstructions—has put pressure on the KMT and exposed its inability to politically rebrand itself and widely appeal to the electorate. As discussed in the previous section, even though Tsai’s popularity was low prior to the 22 local and city government elections in November 2018, which in effect negatively impacted the DPP candidates’ results, circumstances began to change months before the presidential election. According to the TVBS polling centre, at the start of the presidential race, Tsai was not leading in the polls.

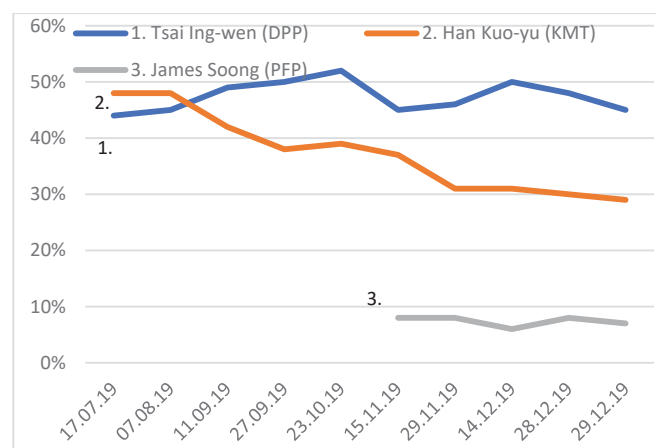


Fig. 2 Polls – January 2020 presidential elections [40]-[42]

On 29 December 2019, 13 days before the presidential and legislative elections, a televised presidential debate was held. A key issue that was discussed in the debate and that very much influenced Taiwanese voters was the No China Extradition bill protests in Hong Kong. The pro-democracy and anti-government movements were not going to stop protesting until demands such as the withdrawal of the bill and universal suffrage were met. These demonstrations naturally raised the question of how real ‘autonomy’ is within the ‘one country, two systems’ framework. Understandingly, these events in Hong Kong have caused a sense of alarm because the KMT’s term ‘1992 Consensus’ could lead to a similar outcome in Taiwan. In the televised debate, referring to Tsai, Han said:

The people of Hong Kong are bleeding, and your votes are tainted with their blood ... you are exploiting the lives of university students.

Tsai responded, saying,

We could choose to accept the ‘1992 Consensus’ – ‘one country, two systems’ – and gamble the future of our

young people. We could also choose an open democratic system, defend our sovereignty, Taiwan, the Republic of China ... President Xi Jinping said that on the basis of the one-China principle, the two sides should promote the ‘1992 Consensus’ because both sides are part of one China ... the ‘one country, two systems’ framework is the best way to galvanise reunification.

Tsai added that,

Dear compatriots, there is no Republic of China in the ‘1992 Consensus’ ... For how long will the KMT continue deceiving themselves and others?

Tsai also shared a letter she received from a young man in Hong Kong:

I ask the people of Taiwan not to trust the Chinese Communist Party, don’t trust any pro-communist official, don’t fall into China’s money trap ... think about the future of your children, don’t make the same historical mistake ... otherwise, in the next 20 years they’ll have to go to the streets and experience what we’re now experiencing.

In response to the anti-extradition bill query from the TV anchor Zou Jingwen, Han replied,

Tsai Ing-wen, don’t push me towards the ‘one China, two systems’ like what I do when squeezing the tube for toothpaste when it’s almost finished [43].

Han felt that he had been continuously smeared with the ‘1992 Consensus’ term throughout the presidential campaign. As the Mayor of Kaohsiung, Han’s meeting with Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam and Wang Zhimin, the director of Beijing’s liaison office in Hong Kong, on 22 March 2019 was misrepresented weeks later when anti-extradition protests drew media attention. Speculation and rumours about his national loyalty, intentions and Taiwanese identity were inevitable. For example, comparing ‘Taiwan’s independence’ with syphilis was an inflammatory remark. The lack of clarity in relation to how the ‘make a fortune’ promise made to the people of Kaohsiung was going to be instituted also added more suspicion about his sincerity and his qualifications for the mayoral position. The final blow to Han’s reputation was when he announced his intention to abandon his post and run for the presidency. Clearly, many Kaohsiung former-Han supporters and individuals from all sectors felt disappointed, angry and betrayed. That being said, because Han had an unusual style and promised richness and fortune in his discourse, many wrongly labelled him a populist. There were no dichotomic or hegemonic struggles in his political stance. Rhetoric is not enough. Even with the full backing of the KMT’s political machinery, there were no instances of populist practices in Han’s presidential campaign. The presidential results reveal how unconvincing Han’s persona was on Election Day:

TABLE II
 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS RESULTS: NATIONWIDE AND KAOHSIUNG [44]

2020 Presidential Candidates	Nationwide votes	Voters (%)	Kaohsiung votes	Voters (%)
Tsai (DPP)	8,170,231	57.13	1,097,621	62.23
Han (KMT)	5,522,119	38.61	610,896	34.63
Soong (FPF)	608,590	4.26	55,309	3.14
Turnout (%)	14,300,940	74.90	1,763,826	77.44

Tsai's landslide victory was a humiliation for Han and the KMT. Over a year after the DPP's embarrassing losses in the local and city government elections in November 2018, the DPP succeeded in changing its electoral fortune on 11 January 2020. Han's decision to run for the presidency shortly after winning his mayoral victory in Kaohsiung also made him look dishonest. Comparing the votes in Han's November 2018 mayoral victory with the presidential votes in Kaohsiung shows that Han lost the support of 281,649 voters. James Soong (PFP) was not Tsai's potential rival either. There were rumours that the Mayor of Taipei, Ko Wen-je—who is also the founder and chairman of the new party *Taiwan People's Party* (TPP), founded on 5 August 2019—was going to run for the presidency. However, Ko failed to register before the deadline set by the Central Election Commission (CEC). Had Ko registered in time, many 'swing voters' would have chosen Ko rather than Tsai. That said, it would have been easier for Han and the KMT to accept a less humiliating defeat.

VI. THE RECALL MOVEMENT

At the end of June 2019, shortly after Han announced his decision to run in the KMT's presidential primaries, the petition to recall Mayor Han began. Based on a partnership, the grassroots activist groups *Wecare Kaohsiung*, *Citizens Mowing Action*, and the *State Building Party* organised the process of collecting the required signatures for the petition to gain legal credibility.

The recall of an elected official is a three-step process. The petitioners must first submit a recall proposal bearing the signatures of 1% of registered voters in the area. Next, the petitioners must submit a petition containing the signatures of 10% of the voters. Finally, a poll must be held in which at least 25% of the registered voters are in favour of recalling the elected official. Of the 2.28 million eligible voters in Kaohsiung, the participation of 577,000 people was required for the recall to succeed in the final step.

To shed light on the motives behind removing Han from office, interviews with the key leaders of *Citizens Mowing Action*, *Wecare Kaohsiung*, and the *State Building Party* were conducted. According to Dr. Leo Lee, head of *Citizens Mowing Action*,

Between January and March 2019, Mayor Han's speeches were misleading. His trip to Hong Kong in March also concerned us a lot because he visited Beijing's liaison office, which overrides the 'One country, two systems' principle. No one knows what they talked about. This triggered a sense of anger. We don't know if they talked about the '1992 Consensus'. In his speeches, he never criticised the Chinese government. It gives the impression that he's following orders from China. People have realised that. In a democracy, the people have the power.

Referring to the intention of *Citizens Mowing Action*, Lin noted that,

To recall Han is not our only objective. The ultimate goal of our movement is to make people aware that they have the power in their hands, called: Recall Petition.

There will be other politicians like Mayor Han in the future [45].

The other key recall petition activist contacted was Aaron Yi, the main leader of *Wecare Kaohsiung*. First, Yi stated that,

The DPP had been in power for too long in Kaohsiung, and people were not happy with President Tsai. People also didn't like the KMT, but Han Kuo-yu brought something fresh and different. Han moved young people's hearts with very 'Big Words' such as 'Kaohsiung is ugly', 'we're going to get rich', 'come back home to work', and 'Kaohsiung has no culture or class'.

At first glance, Han appeared to fit the general populist profiling as he was seen as an alternative candidate who spoke with colourful language. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, Han had the backing of a former authoritarian party in which retail politics are the antipode of populist politics. Yi continued, stating that Han's spark quickly faded:

Shortly after he was elected, we realised he was a liar. He turned out to be a man with no substance: 'Empty Words'. Han never explained how he was going to help Kaohsiung's economy.

Yi concluded that,

Han is an embarrassment for the KMT. Like Han, my father is also a Mainlander. All my family supports the KMT. We need the KMT in our democratic system. However, the KMT needs to recognise that young and middle-aged Taiwanese people don't identify themselves as Chinese [46].

Peter Chang, from the *State Building Party*, was the last of the leaders who were organising Han's recall petition who was interviewed. Describing Han's increasing popularity, Chang noted that,

Han managed to portray himself as a man of the people. He cultivated that image well in Kaohsiung by giving the impression that he understood their struggles.

Chang also said that,

People were tired of politics, and Han exploited that sentiment well. A lot of 'Fake News' also helped Han consolidate his popularity. With pro-China propaganda and spinning anecdotes such as the losses of farmers, Han managed to influence voters.

Responding to the question of young voters' support during Han's mayoral campaign, Chang stated,

Many Han voters, particularly young ones, were persuaded by Han because he was a funny guy with a different point of view. That Han was a KMT candidate was secondary. They voted for Han, not the KMT's '1992 Consensus' framework.

The *State Building Party* was the only political party coordinating the recall petition. During the interview, Chang described why his party participated in the recall and the origin of the party,

We are recalling Han because he has done nothing for Kaohsiung ... The *State Building Party* emerged from the 2014 Sunflower Movement. We realised that there were no political groups that radically advocated for 'Taiwan's independence' [47].

On 7 March 2020, the recall organisers submitted 400,000 signatures to the Kaohsiung City Election Commission. That was more than the 228,000 (10%) required for the second stage of the recall process. After careful examination, almost 380,000 signatures were approved. It became clear then that Han's tenure as Kaohsiung's mayor was potentially coming to an end. In the Taipei High Administrative Court and at the Executive Yuan, Han tried to challenge the legal basis for ousting him from power. Han's legal team questioned key issues, such as the validity of the timeframe for collecting signatures [48]. However, this effort to stop the recall was in vain. On 5 May 2020, trying to minimise further political damage, Han chose to apologise for his decision to spend months concentrating on his presidential campaign rather than focusing on his mayoral duties [49]. Han's motive was to avoid the recall, which was set to be held on 6 June 2020 and had to reach the turnout threshold of 577,000 (25%) eligible voters.

It has been observed how these movements worked together and mobilised an effective anti-Han street campaign. For example, on 28 April 2020, outside of Kaohsiung's Central Government Building, the leaders and activists of the three organisations demanded Han's recall. All the media outlets covered the event. Shortly after, as locals in the neighbourhood came out to the streets to toss their rubbish bags into the rubbish truck, which was at picking spots, activists gave people 'recall' posters and encouraged them to support this democratic initiative. This occasion was very symbolic, as it implied that Han was also rubbish and therefore Kaohsiungers should get rid of him. On 1 June 2020, Peter Chang, Taichung's Legislator Chen Po-wei and activists of the *State Building Party* in Ciatou District giving small, yellow '0606 2020 Recall' banners to residents and urging people to recall Han on 6 June. They then moved to 3rd Wufu Road, near Kaohsiung's Love River, where they joined forces with other organisations. People of different ages came together; listened to the speeches of leaders such as Dr Leo Lin, Aaron Yi and Peter Chang; and carried a long, wide, yellow banner towards the other side of the river. The energy, support and willingness to oust Han was extraordinary. With a voter turnout of 42.14%, 939,090 voters were in favour of removing Han from office. This caused further embarrassment for the KMT and constituted an astonishing achievement for the recall movement:

TABLE III
 PETITION TO RECALL HAN RESULTS [50]

Kaohsiung Recall	Votes	Percentage (%)
In favour	939,090	97.40
Against	25,051	02.60

In November 2018, Han won the mayoral race with 892,545 votes. This time, only 25,051 voters decided to support him once again in the ballot box. The turnout for the anti-Han campaign managed to surpass the turnout threshold by more than 360,000 votes. The apparent populist Han became a refreshing KMT political star for many Kaohsiung voters. In less than two years, however, Han's spark with the electorate vanished. Factors such as his poor political sensitivity, inflated confidence, unreal promises and distance from Taiwanese

identity values led to Han's downfall.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The initial motive of this article was to put forward an academic definition of the concept of populism and thereby illustrate the inaccuracy of categorising Han Kuo-yu as a populist. The overuse of the term populism, particularly by the media, has led to a misconception of political practices and the incorrect labelling of politicians who behave and articulate their rhetoric differently. It is argued that we need to examine other conditions to determine whether a political project or leader is populist. Without outlining an "Us-Them" axis position, articulating a clear challenge against institutional frameworks and epitomising a new hegemonic vision in Taiwan's society, it is incorrect to define a KMT politician as populist. In other words, it is not enough to claim that a politician is a populist simply because he/she is charismatic, colourful, passionate or folklorically entertaining.

In the process of researching whether—and to what degree—Han represented instances of populist politics, other political as well as Taiwanese identity factors were brought to the surface. Against this background, for this analysis to make a valuable contribution to the literature, the scope of this article had to be expanded beyond the populist scope. As discussed in this article, Tsai's overall low approval ratings as she was experiencing the mid-term blues provided not only Han but also other KMT local and city government candidates a superb opportunity to inflict humiliating defeats on the DPP. Much attention, however, has focused on Han's Kaohsiung victory rather than on the other KMT electoral successes.

It is argued that Han managed to successfully exploit the need for change that young Kaohsiung voters were looking for. Forced to search for work in northern Taiwan, as there is a lack of rewarding employment in the south, young voters were attracted by Han's promise to transform the old and poor Kaohsiung into a vibrant and rich city. There were other swing voters, however, who gave Han that one-off victory. Nonetheless, based on discussions with young Kaohsiung voters and on poll popularity results, the youth vote was vital.

For voters, Han's downfall was when he visited Hong Kong in March 2019 and potentially flirted with the term '1992 Consensus'. That is, he discreetly endorsed reunification. Han's lack of clear support towards pro-democracy demonstrations weeks after his visit to Hong Kong unmasked another Han. As Kaohsiung's mayor, failing to provide a well-defined economic strategy for the city further disappointed its residents. The final blow was on 17 May 2019, when he broke his promise not to run for the presidency. As the KMT had and still has no leader with charisma or the ability to move the masses, attempts to replicate Kaohsiung's November 2018 mayoral success in the January 2020 presidential election proved to be a serious political miscalculation. In the voters' eyes, Han simply was a 'one-hit wonder' politician.

A sense of disappointment mixed with anger amongst Kaohsiungers generated a remarkable exercise of the democratic right of the people to recall the leader they electorally supported less than two years earlier. The motivation

that triggered movements such as *Citizens Mowing Action*, *We care Kaohsiung*, and the *State Building Party* created a unique democratic force in this young Asian democracy. The '0606 2020 Recall' was a collective political construct that provided a decisive narrative, effectively managed to overcome the obstacles Han's camp put in place and gathered more votes than Han had received when he was elected mayor in November 2019. The Han experience gives the KMT an opportunity to reflect upon what it represents as a former Chinese political party. With no clear leadership, the KMT needs to re-fresh itself—e.g., with a new definition of the '1992 Consensus'—to be electorally competitive in Taiwan's fully fledged democratic system.

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