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**Populism in Taiwan: a Bottom-up Model**

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***Introduction***

During President Ma's terms, a series of social protests took place in Taiwan. These movements disapproved of the way the KMT was handling cross-strait relations, economic development, social justice, and environmental management. It is widely conceived among civil society organizations that the KMT, domestic big business, and multinational companies constitute a power bloc that rigs the economy and weakens Taiwan's democracy. The direct political results of these anti-establishment social movements were the creation of the White Force (WF) and the New Power Party (NPP). The leaders of both forces are political novices and opinion leaders of the social movements. These two political forces tend to assert a Manichean dualism of the corrupt elite and the pure masses.

Taiwan's populism movement features a bottom-up model in which autonomous civil society organizations cooperate to voice their opposition to the ruling elite. This movement has over time given rise to new political forces. In addition, this movement helps push forward several political reforms to level the playing field of political competition and increase civil participation in public policies. However, it also arouses some concerns about interfering with the function of representative democracy and technocratic governance. How this bottom-up model of populism affects the function of democracy is our main research question. Another unique feature of Taiwan's populism is that this movement in a large part stems from the fear of a close economic relationship between Taiwan and China and from questioning the authoritarian legacy of the KMT rule, such as its party assets. Protecting and strengthening democracy appear to be two important goals of the movement. We will ask how the nature of the movement affects the functioning of democracy.

In this paper, we first identify who the populists in Taiwan in recent years are. We then discuss their issues and agendas and explore the demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds of the populists, including their leaders. Next, we will examine the sources of the movement and how these new parties fared in elections. Finally, we examine the positive and negative impacts of the populist movement on the functioning of democracy. In terms of research approaches, in addition to a detailed account of the movement, we will employ two surveys, the 2015 Democratic Governance survey conducted by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy and the Fourth Wave Asian Barometer survey (hereafter ABS) conducted in 2015 to help us understand people's attitudes toward the movement. The first survey examines who is more likely to support the populist movement. The second examines how democratic values affect people's image of China and how this factor plays an important role in affecting popular views of the populist movement.

## Literature Review

Mudde<sup>1</sup> and Mudde and Kaltwasser<sup>2</sup> consider populism a thin-centered ideology whose core idea is that a society consists of the pure and common people and the corrupt elite. The populist leaders claim that they represent the general will of the people rather than the special interests of the elite. Because of the thin ideology, populism is compatible with different ideologies and in different historical and geographical economic contexts. Weyland defines populism as a political strategy in which political leaders argue that they directly represent the will of the people.<sup>3</sup> The relationship between the populist leaders and the common people is less institutionalized and more fluid. Thus, political movements that clearly make the distinction between the pure people and the corrupt elite and that claim to represent the interests of the ordinary people are often labeled as populist.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, because populism condemns the corruption and ineffectiveness of representative systems, they emphasize the importance of a direct relationship between leaders and the people. Thus, populists endorse many forms of direct democracy.<sup>5</sup>

Populism can come in different forms. First, one can categorize populist movements by the definition of the people each movement refers to. It may include common people, ethnic or religious groups, which is often associated with right-wing populism; and specific social classes, which is often associated with left-wing populism. Alternatively, Aslanidis classifies populist movements according to who organizes the movement.<sup>6</sup> Often mentioned is the top-down model in which an outsider politician mobilizes people to help him or her win the election. A less-mentioned case is the bottom-up model in which autonomous civil society organizations cooperate to form a populist movement which may, after a period of time, generate populist politicians. Levitsky and Roberts (2011) find that in Latin America, populism is a top-down political mobilization led by charismatic leaders.<sup>7</sup> Nielsen finds that populist movements often evolve from heterogeneous demands to a collective identity that goes against the power bloc and establishment.<sup>8</sup> Then, there emerge the leaders who claim they represent the people. As a bottom-up example, Taiwan differs from the top-down model, which is likely to have different implications for democratic development. We will explore this aspect throughout this article.

Following Mudde and Kaltwasser and many others, we adopt a thin-centered definition of populism. First, populism criticizes elites and the existing political and economic institutions as corrupt and incompetent. Next, populist leaders tend to claim that they represent the people and that the representative system fails to heed the voices of the people. Note that the term populism is widely used in Taiwan. In many cases, people equate politicians' pursuit of policies that focus only on short-term interests and disregard long-term interests with populism. We do not adopt this definition of populism, however, as it is too broad. We focus on the large-scale social movements during President Ma's terms of office and the emergence and development of the White Force led by Taipei

<sup>1</sup> Cas Mudde. "The populist zeitgeist." *Government and opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541-563.

<sup>2</sup> Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. "Populism." In *The Oxford handbook of political ideologies*. 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Kurt Weyland. "Clarifying a contested concept: Populism in the study of Latin American politics." *Comparative politics* (2001): 1-22.

<sup>4</sup> Dwayne Woods. "The many faces of populism: diverse but not disparate." In *The many faces of populism: current perspectives*, pp. 1-25. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. "Populism." In *The Oxford handbook of political ideologies*. 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Paris Aslanidis. "Populism and social movements." *The Oxford handbook of populism* (2017): 306-325.

<sup>7</sup> Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts, eds. *The resurgence of the Latin American left*. JHU Press, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Rasmus Kleis Nielsen. "Hegemony, radical democracy, populism." *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 7, no. 2 (2006): 77-97.

Mayor Ko Wen-je and the New Power Party (NPP). Populism often arises during periods of prolonged economic recession and stagnation, or mass immigration.<sup>9</sup> Populism is also associated with great economic transformation, such as shifting from an agrarian to an industrial economy and rapid globalization.<sup>10</sup> People think that mainstream political parties, representative institutions, and political elites are corrupt and fail to address their needs and discontents. We will review the structural conditions that Taiwan has faced in recent years that have given rise to the populist movement.

Populism can bring good or bad to a society, and is not necessarily incompatible with democracy. Laclau argues that many populist movements advocate progressive agendas and demand large-scale changes in the political system.<sup>11</sup> Populist movements in many countries contribute to furthering democratization, such as extending franchise to working class people and women, and inducing governments to address neglected social issues.<sup>12</sup> By encouraging the political participation of disfranchised groups, populism can enhance democracy.<sup>13</sup> Kazin, who examines the populist movement at the turn of the twentieth century in the United States, argues that populist movements may rebalance the distribution of political power between the established powers and social groups.<sup>14</sup> It becomes the tool for marginal groups to protest against economic and political inequality. The function of checks and balances in existing democratic institutions may only serve to protect the interests of the elite, and do not represent the true will of the common people. The movement in the nineteenth century advocated greater voter participation that included secret ballots, direct primaries, and direct election of senators. On the economic side, it included fewer working hours, increased social welfare, and consumer protection. Many of these ideas were later adopted during the progressive movement in the earlier twentieth century. Now, many populist movements also advocate citizen initiatives, referendums, and recall voting to give people more of a voice in the political process.

Populism also has its downsides. Since populist leaders believe they represent the will of people, and therefore nothing should stand between them and enacting their agenda, they have problems with checks and balances and minority rights.<sup>15</sup> By emphasizing direct engagement and plebiscites, populism may also undermine “the legitimacy and power of political institutions (e.g. parties and parliaments) and unelected bodies.”<sup>16</sup> “In a populist assembly there is no need to count votes and acknowledge minorities, because the leader will be a leader of the whole, not simply the majority.”<sup>17</sup> Müller argues that contemporary populism accepts the idea of democracy as majority rule and elections but is less enthusiastic about checks and balanc-

<sup>9</sup> Paul Taggart. “Populism and the pathology of representative politics.” In *Democracies and the populist challenge*, pp. 62-80. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2002; John B. Judis. *The populist explosion: How the great recession transformed American and European politics*. New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016; William A. Galston. “The populist challenge to liberal democracy.” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 2 (2018): 5-19.

<sup>10</sup> Nadia Urbinati. “Democracy and populism.” *Constellations* 5, no. 1 (1998): 110-124.

<sup>11</sup> Ernesto Laclau. “Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory New Left Books.” (1977); Ernesto Laclau. *On populist reason*. Verso, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Paris Aslanidis. “Populism and social movements.” *The Oxford handbook of populism* (2017): 306-325.

<sup>13</sup> Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. “The ambivalence of populism: threat and corrective for democracy.” *Democratization* 19, no. 2 (2012): 184-208; Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy. “Populism: An Overview of the Concept and the State of the Art.” (2017): 1-24.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Kazin. *The populist persuasion: An American history*. Cornell University Press, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. “Populism.” In *The Oxford handbook of political ideologies*. 2013; Bonikowski, Bart. “Ethno-nationalist populism and the mobilization of collective resentment.” *The British journal of sociology* 68 (2017): S181-S213.

<sup>16</sup> Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. “Populism.” In *The Oxford handbook of political ideologies*. 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Nadia Urbinati. “Democracy and populism.” *Constellations* 5, no. 1 (1998): 110-124.

es, freedom of the press, and procedural fairness.<sup>18</sup> Besides, because of their anti-establishment claims, populists often demand radical solutions and are less willing to compromise. Thus, populism is often considered to be at odds with the liberal democratic model.

Mudde and Kaltwasser instead argue that the influence of populism on democracy is more complicated as it is context-dependent.<sup>19</sup> Populism in general has a stronger effect on unconsolidated democracies. In addition, populism in government tends to exert a greater adverse effect on democracy than populism in opposition.<sup>20</sup> In consolidated democracies, populism launched by the opposition is expected to have a positive effect on the functioning of democracy. In contrast, in unconsolidated democracies, populism launched by the government is expected to have a negative effect on democracy. Levitsky and Loxton also argue that populism in nascent democracies could pose a serious threat to the functioning of democracy.<sup>21</sup> Populism in Taiwan is a bottom-up model, and with the condition that Taiwan is a consolidated democracy, it seems natural to suggest that the recent populist movement will have a positive effect on democratic development. We will explore to what extent this is the case.

### *Populists and Their Demands*

#### **Who Are the Populists?**

During President Ma's terms in office, a series of social protests took place in Taiwan.<sup>22</sup> Civil society organizations (CSOs) disapproved of the ruling KMT elites and their policies. These social movements railed against the coalition of the KMT, big business, and the model of economic development. The KMT government denoted an old regime that is politically, socially, and economically conservative. CSOs and the young generation tend to embrace progressive values and perceive the KMT's policies as putting too much emphasis on economic growth and paying too little attention to distributive justice and environmental protection. The KMT governed Taiwan for seventy years, except for the short period between 2000 and 2008. Many members of CSOs fought for Taiwan's democratic transition in the past, and so they do not like the KMT, especially the authoritarian legacy the present-day party inherited, such as the huge party assets and its close relationship with local factions. In addition, CSOs demand open government and greater civic participation in the government decision-making process. Moreover, they are uneasy with the closer economic relationship between Taiwan and China and the official interactions between the two sides. It is perceived that the KMT's economic policies rely too heavily on the Chinese market. It is widely conceived in civil society that the KMT and big business groups, which invest heavily in China, form a coalition that rigs the economy and even tries to weaken Taiwan's vibrant democracy. The CSOs care about freedom and democracy and have a low level of trust in the KMT government, meaning they worry about the political implications of Taiwan's economy increasingly relying on the Chinese market. A typical observation is that the

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<sup>18</sup> Jan-Werner Müller. *What is populism?*. Penguin UK, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. "Populism." In *The Oxford handbook of political ideologies*. 2013.

<sup>20</sup> As a bottom-up model, Taiwan is definitely a populism-in-opposition model.

<sup>21</sup> Steven Levitsky and James Loxton. "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism: The Case of Fujimori's Peru." *Populism in Europe and the Americas: threat or corrective for democracy* (2012): 160-181.

<sup>22</sup> These protests were all launched by civil society groups. In some cases, the main opposition party—the DPP—also took part, but DPP did not orchestrate these protests.

big conglomerates monopolize local and cross-strait business, depriving ordinary people and the young generation of economic opportunities.<sup>23</sup>

During this period, civil society organizations staged several large-scale protests and were able to successfully block several government policies.<sup>24</sup> In each protest, hundreds and sometimes thousands of people took part. Some important events include: the protests over the death of Hung Chung-chiu, a young enlisted soldier who was mistreated while serving in the army; the Miaoli Dapu land case about the expropriation of farmland for use by an industrial park; stopping the fourth nuclear power plant project; the Sunflower Student Movement that opposed the ratification of the service trade agreement with China; preservation of the Losheng Sanatorium; and the Wenlin-Yuan urban renewal project. Anti-KMT sentiment piled up during President Ma's second term, which eventually brought down the ruling party in the 2016 election.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the election victory of the Democratic Progress Party (DPP), the direct political products of this anti-establishment movement are the rise of the White Force and the NPP. The leaders of both forces are political novices and the opinion leaders of the social movements. The White Force is led by Ko Wen-je, previously a surgeon at National Taiwan University Hospital. Ko originally was a deep Green supporter, but later on strategically distanced himself from conventional politicians and began identifying himself as a political novice. He is not the leader of any particular movement, but he rode the crest of the strong anti-establishment wave of this period. He gained popularity amid widespread distrust of the main political parties and elites. The NPP is the direct result of the Sunflower Student Movement in 2014 that occupied the legislature for twenty-four days and successfully blocked the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement between Taiwan and China. The NPP was formed by leaders of the Sunflower Movement. It is widely perceived by the public that these free trade negotiations were conducted in a secret manner.<sup>26</sup>

Because of their anti-establishment views, the social movements and the WF and NPP assert a clear dichotomy between the corrupt elites and the people. They argue that the existing political and economic system is corrupt and ineffective. They use this argument to summarize the source of Taiwan's political and economic problems. This rhetoric serves as an effective tool to raise awareness and mobilize people. The DPP pretty much uses the same campaign rhetoric, but they are more moderate and pragmatic.<sup>27</sup> From 2008 to 2016, the DPP rode on the bandwagon of the anti-establishment movement, which helped it defeat the KMT in the 2016 presidential election. Although the focus here is mainly on the KMT, on many occasions people feel frustrated with both major political parties. Some people argue that the two major parties are working against the will of the people.

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<sup>23</sup> Another example is that many people think the fourth nuclear power plant is the product of old KMT authoritarian rule. Stopping the nuclear plant equals eliminating the KMT's rule and advancing democracy.

<sup>24</sup> Ming-sho Ho. "The resurgence of social movements under the Ma Ying-jeou government: A political opportunity structure perspective." *Political Changes in Taiwan Under Ma Ying-jeou: Partisan Conflict, Policy Choices, External Constraints and Security Challenges* (2014): 100-119.

<sup>25</sup> Although in these movements "elite" mainly refers to the KMT, for some people there is disappointment toward both the KMT and the DPP.

<sup>26</sup> Actually, discussions surrounding this trade agreement were technically no less transparent than the trade talks with other countries, such as New Zealand.

<sup>27</sup> After the DPP took office in 2016, the KMT also from time to time has used the same elite-common people rhetoric. But it delivers fewer anti-establishment messages.

## The Populist Issues and Agendas

The social movements focus on a wide variety of social issues, ranging from ecology, distributive justice, human rights protection, judicial reform, and China's encroachment. They are based on many progressive social values or the so-called post-material values, and tend to embrace liberal democratic values. All of these movements disapprove of the way the KMT has handled cross-strait management, economic development, distributive justice, and environmental management. To a different degree, they also declare a Manichean dualism of corrupt elites and pure masses and perceive a failure of representative democracy. They focus individually on one particular social issue while in many cases expressing support for each other. These CSOs are independent and are not officially affiliated with any political party. They undertake a variety of direct actions such as marching, sit-ins, petitions, boycotts, and staging protests against the government and, in some cases, companies.

During the elections in 2015, Mayor Ko took advantage of the popular discontent and portrayal of the existing political and economic systems as corrupt. Once elected, he declared five main public works build-operate-transfer (BOT) projects in Taipei as scandals and set up committees to investigate each case. In some cases, the Taipei City government unilaterally ended the contracts. The investigations, however, eventually went nowhere and his government seldom mentions them two years later. These actions hurt the stability of rule of law and scared off many would-be investors. Business investment in Taipei has declined dramatically since Mayor Ko took office. In addition, because he spent so much time dealing with the accusations against the former administration and BOT, he really did not have much time left to see to other tasks. This phenomenon pretty much explains the difference in approval ratings between Ko and Taoyuan Mayor Cheng, a DPP member, who avoids such rhetorical language and is much more pragmatic. Besides these large-scale, prominent cases, once elected, Mayor Ko's policy stances on several issues shifted to being very close to those of the former government. In the latter half of Mayor Ko's first term, he scaled back the corrupt elite/pure people rhetoric and shifted his policy stance to be more moderate on both economic issues and the cross-strait issue spectrum. For example, before he was elected, he complained that many urban renewal projects favored the developers. However, Mayor Ko adopted an even tougher stance toward tearing down the buildings whose owners did not want to be part of urban renewal projects. He also criticized the BOT developers for caring only about money while at the same time his government endeavored to develop public land by soliciting business investment, including in the form of BOT. In many interviews, his answers were quite vague regarding many public policy issues.

Mayor Ko believes that the representative institutions fail to be responsive to people's needs and discontent, so he promotes the direct participation of citizens in the decision-making process. With the popularity of the Internet in general and social media in particular, online participation methods such as e-voting (proposed by the government) and online policy initiatives (proposed by citizens) have become possible. Mayor Ko thinks that politicians should respond more directly to the people. He has introduced i-voting, participatory budgets, and open data schemes. In 2015, the Taipei City government introduced the i-voting online polling platform, which allows citizens to express their preferences on certain important public policy issues. I-voting was even used to decide who would be the city commissioners of many units such as education and transportation and is being used to evaluate the performance of the commissioners. Using i-voting to decide on city officials, however, has not been a



great success.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, some issues are highly complicated and technical, such as the public works BOT projects, so i-voting may not always be the best way to decide such policies. In 2017, Ko even proposed allowing civic participation to decide the bidding on a 25 billion USD BOT project, including the qualifications of the bidders, bidding procedure, technology requirements, and the bid price. Here, tension inevitably emerges between civil participation and technocratic governance regarding such technical and complicated issues.

Because of the alleged failure of representative democracy to address the needs of the people, the NPP also promotes direct democracy. The NPP and the DPP have proposed amendments to the Referendum Act lowering the threshold of eligible voters to initiate a referendum proposal (from 0.5 percent to 0.01 percent) and the threshold to put a referendum proposal to a vote (from 5 percent to 1.5 percent). The amendments also reduced the quorum to pass a proposal. Before that, it required that at least 50 percent of the electorate cast ballots and an absolute relative majority of valid votes. Now it only requires that at least 25 percent of the electorate cast ballots and a relative majority of valid votes. This new law also gets rid of the review committee which can turn down a referendum proposal.<sup>29</sup> The direct result of the change in the quorum was the mushrooming of the number of citizen initiatives in the municipal and county elections in 2018. There were ten referendum proposals to be voted on in that election, ranging from gay marriage, nuclear power, and air pollution, to changing the name used for Olympic and international competitions (Chinese Taipei).

In reviewing the referendum law, the NPP proposed extending it so that constitutional clauses could be decided by referendum. One of the most important issues is the nation's official title and territory, both of which are very sensitive given Taiwan's unique position in the international power structure. The NPP also proposed amending the law to require that any cross-strait political negotiations be voted on in a referendum before the negotiations begin. The term "political negotiations" is quite vague. Following the Sunflower Movement, trade agreements have also taken on important political and national security implications. These two proposals were eventually struck down by other major parties.

To promote direct democracy, the NPP also rejected the right of party leaders to control how individual party members vote in legislative reviews. Strong party discipline, however, is important for party leaders in democracies to command loyalty from fellow party members during legislative voting. In 2015, the founding members of the party launched a campaign to recall several KMT legislators for strictly following the party line, a common practice in Western parliamentary systems. In 2016, the NPP and the DPP jointly passed a law that lowered the popular vote threshold that is required to recall an elected official. Before, it was required that more than half of total voters in a district actually vote and that there be an absolute majority of valid votes. The NPP favored requiring a simple majority and no electorate restrictions. The final version adopted a simple majority and one-fourth of the electorate cast ballots as the threshold. The low quorum for a recall vote may induce legislators not to follow party discipline to pass some tough reform bills. In democracies, strong party discipline is an important foundation by which ruling parties are able to govern. One year later, the chairman of the NPP almost be-

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<sup>28</sup> Two years later, the system allows citizens to submit proposals on issues to be voted on by the public, upon approval by city officials and a public participatory committee. But in practice, government in most cases rejected the i-voting results. For participatory budgeting, many proposals were raised but most are not mature and nearly all were later rejected by the Taipei City government. Many forms of citizen participation in decision making are still experimental.

<sup>29</sup> Lin, Sean. "Referendum Act Amendments Approved." *Taipei Times*. Available at Taipei Times: December 13, 2017.

came a victim of the new rule. Because of his stance in supporting the Same-sex Marriage Act, anti-equality organizations launched a campaign to recall him. The requirement that 25 percent of the electorate cast ballots saved him.

### **Absorbed into the Existing Political System**

Both the NPP and the WF participate in elections and remain independent from the main political parties. The strong discontent against the ruling elites during President Ma's second term contributed to the victory of the DPP, and the growth of the NPP and the WF. The DPP did not nominate candidates in those districts where the NPP nominated candidates, helping them win several seats. The NPP gained 6.11 percent of the votes and five seats from the total of 113 in the 2016 parliamentary elections, quickly becoming the third-largest party in the legislature. The main supporters of the two movements tend to be young people, liberal-minded people, and people who favor Taiwan's independence or maintaining the status quo. Mayor Ko enjoyed quite high approval ratings in the first half of his term, especially among younger voters, although his approval ratings did decline in the second half. Ko received 57 percent of the vote in the 2014 Taipei mayoral elections, but only received 41 percent in the 2018 elections. Meanwhile, the NPP's approval rating dropped from 14 percent in 2016 to 6 percent in late 2017.

There are several reasons for the general decline in approval ratings. First, in the three years after the DPP assumed power, the basic economic conditions for ordinary Taiwanese people have not changed very much. Young people still face a bleak economic outlook. China still uses every means available to weaken Taiwan's de facto sovereign status, so Taiwan's international space has not improved. Second, the DPP and the WF have shifted their economic policies to be more pro-market. There is virtually no difference between the DPP, the KMT, and the WF in terms of economic policy other than the cross-strait economic relationship. Next, since the DPP assumed office, there have not been any trade agreements between Taiwan and China under review. The NPP is largely a protest party focusing mainly on the China issue. No negotiations between the two sides of the strait means no protests. Moreover, former President Ma Ying-jeou, whom some allege sold out Taiwan, does not show any signs of rushing to promote unification.

Even though Mayor Ko's approval rating declined in the four years since his inauguration, he remains quite popular among the young generation and is a likely front-runner in the next presidential election. Many people think that since the KMT cannot address Taiwan's economic problems, the DPP should be given the chance. Now that it appears that the DPP is not doing a good job either, Ko is the sole remaining hope for many. As mayor, he is not responsible for managing Taiwan's economic growth, distribution, and social justice, so people do not attribute Taiwan's sluggish economy to him. Moreover, some people agree that he has not done well in terms of managing the city, but Mayor Ko speaks in a way that connects with them.



## *Causes of the Rise of Populism*

### **Economic Reasons**

The first important underlying cause of the anti-establishment movement is that Taiwan's economy has passed the high-income threshold. In the wake of globalization, manufacturing companies have moved to developing countries with abundant sources of labor, cheap land, and poor environmental regulations. Globalization benefits the people in developing countries and the skilled workers and elites in wealthy countries. Therefore, the working class and a significant portion of the middle class have "lost confidence in mainstream parties and established institutions."<sup>30</sup> Given this situation, some politicians have begun to blame developing countries for causing their economic problems. Along with rising globalization and advances in production automation, income inequality and unemployment rates in Taiwan have increased. The household income survey indicates that the country's Gini coefficient was 0.337 in 2015.<sup>31</sup> This number is roughly equal to those of Japan and South Korea and much lower than those of Hong Kong and Singapore. However, pre-redistribution incomes show that income inequality is becoming a serious problem in Taiwan. Moreover, overtime income inequality has also worsened. The income ratio of the fifth to ninety-fifth percentile was 1:33 in 1998, but rose to an alarming 1:99 in 2014.<sup>32</sup> Compared to other major industrialized countries, Taiwan's tax rates are relatively low, making it difficult to correct the unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity.

In addition, Taiwan's young generation faces a shrinking economic outlook. Expanding college enrollment rates and shrinking job opportunities have created bleak employment prospects for young people. At the same time, many of the high-level, white-collar jobs are already occupied by older people. Although the youth unemployment rate in Taiwan is still lower than in other parts of the world, it remains much higher than the adult unemployment rate. The youth unemployment rate (defined as aged eighteen to twenty-four years) in Taiwan hit 13 percent in recent years, 2.8 times higher than the rest of the population.<sup>33</sup> In addition to rising youth unemployment, the young generation also faces the problem of underemployment. Many young adults are forced into accepting jobs below their level of education with little chance of upward mobility. This situation has intensified the youth's discontent with the existing political and economic regimes.

All of these economic situations provide fertile ground for the anti-establishment movement. The 2015 Democratic Governance Survey, conducted by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, found that 15.8 percent of people who don't endorse the Sunflower Movement are satisfied with the way the government deals with income inequality, while only 3.2 percent of people who endorse the movement are satisfied. Moreover, 66.5 percent of people who don't endorse the Sunflower Movement believe that the central government is corrupt, while 86 percent of its supporters think so.<sup>34</sup> As we can see, even those who do not endorse the movement tend to be dissatisfied with the state of income distribution and corruption. There were strong feelings of discontent in society dur-

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<sup>30</sup> William A. Galston. "The populist challenge to liberal democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 2 (2018): 5-19.

<sup>31</sup> Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics. 2015. *Statistical Yearbook*. Executive Yuan: Taipei.

<sup>32</sup> Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics. 2015. *Statistical Yearbook*. Executive Yuan: Taipei.

<sup>33</sup> Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics. 2015. *Statistical Yearbook*. Executive Yuan: Taipei.

<sup>34</sup> Yu, Chen-hua. *Evaluation of Democratic Governance in Taiwan Survey Report*. Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, 2015.

ing that period. It is likely that even those who did not approve of the protests also want to see some change. Many people perceive that the representative institutions controlled by the main political parties, especially the KMT, fail to respond to the needs and discontent of the public.

### **Political Issues**

On the other hand, the KMT still has some lingering authoritarian legacies. First, it still has huge party assets, which unlevels the playing field of elections. In each election, the KMT can easily outspend its rivals by transferring some of the party's assets to finance the campaign. Next, the KMT tends to nominate candidates who are the children of prominent former government and party leaders. In primaries, the party leaders favor combining registered party member votes and district-wide opinion polling rather than solely relying on the latter. Under this mechanism, the party leaders can easily influence how registered party members vote. In addition, the KMT works comparatively more closely with local factions, and nominates people with criminal records. Related to this, a higher percentage of its candidates or vote brokers are prosecuted in legislative and local elections for vote buying. Finally, the KMT is reluctant to deal with some aspects of the historical interpretation and inheritance of its authoritarian past. These issues include releasing political archives, erasing authoritarian symbols, and addressing its party assets.

In an ethnically divided society like Taiwan, power sharing is important. There are no official rules in the parliament or the electoral system that encourage power sharing. In the winner-take-all nature of Taiwan's political system, room for institutional power sharing is severely reduced. The party that controls the presidency is also likely to control the legislature. Moreover, the disproportionality of the electoral system aggravates this problem. Since 2008, Taiwan has adopted the single member district in legislative elections for most of the seats. Before this change, Taiwan used a single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system that ensured relatively high proportionality. This change further exaggerates the winner-take-all nature of Taiwan's political system. For example, in 2008 and 2012, while the DPP received 37.5 percent and 44.5 percent of the votes, respectively, the winner-take-all nature of the electoral system enabled the KMT to secure three-fourths and nearly two-thirds of the seats respectively. The share of seats won by the KMT greatly exceeded their vote shares in the elections.

Over the past few years, the Internet and the popularity of social media have enabled people to disseminate news and ideas faster. This development also strengthens the power of civil society in checking the discretion and encroachment of the state. With the rising popularity of Internet forums and social media and the decline of traditional media, which tend to be more conservative, Taiwan's ordinary people now have more channels through which to get information, express their opinions, and discuss issues. This new media profile helps the social movements and the two political forces gain popularity and mobilize people.

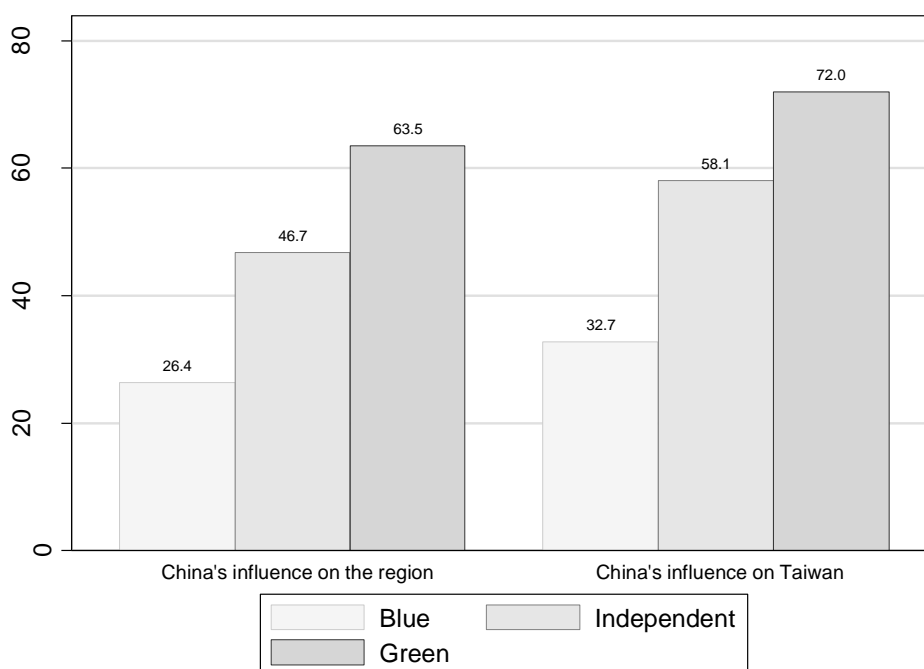
### **The China Factor**

The Blue-Green divide has been the main theme of Taiwan's political development since 2000. Both camps fiercely compete to gain control of the state apparatus so that they can control the pace and direction of the cross-strait

economic and political relationship. After 2008, President Ma's administration sought a closer economic relationship with China. His government sequentially introduced direct air, sea, and postal links with mainland China, opened the door to mainland Chinese tourists, lifted the ban on inbound investment by mainland Chinese firms, and loosened the 40 percent cap on mainland-bound investment by listed companies. There is a strong sentiment among the opposition that cross-strait economic integration may eventually aggravate Taiwan's economic vulnerability, facilitate Beijing's political infiltration into Taiwanese society, and lead to the erosion of Taiwan's autonomy. On the political side, President Ma embraced the "One China, Two Interpretations" policy, or the so-called 1992 Consensus. The Pan-Green camp believes the one-China policy constrains Taiwan's international space. This social divide has historical roots, but the China factor plays a decisive role in aggravating it. The China factor includes the rising political and military power of China and the tightening controls initiated during President Xi's term. Mainland China policies pursued by President Ma to encourage cross-strait economic integration further exacerbated the social divide.

Using the Fourth Wave Asian Barometer survey of 2015, we find that people of different party identifications have starkly different opinions about the negative influence of China on the region and on Taiwan.<sup>35</sup> Figure 1 shows that the Pan-Blue identifiers hold a more favorable view of China's impact, while the Pan-Green identifiers tend to hold an unfavorable view. Twenty-six percent of Pan-Blue leaners say the influence of China on the region is negative, while 64 percent of Pan-Green leaners say so. Thirty-three percent of Pan-Blue leaners say the influence of China on Taiwan is negative, while 72 percent of Pan-Green leaners think this is the case.

**Figure 1.** China's Influence on the Region and on Taiwan



Liberal democratic values also play an important role in shaping Taiwanese attitudes toward China and

<sup>35</sup> Asian Barometer Survey Fourth Wave, 2015.

the KMT's political economic policies. A standard battery of questions on liberal values in the 2015 ABS demonstrated that Taiwanese tend to hold more liberal-leaning views than the rest of the East Asian region. This situation is particularly pronounced among young people. A great majority of Taiwanese respondents disagreed with the following statements: government should consult religious authorities when interpreting the laws; if we have political leaders who are morally upright, we can let them decide everything; government leaders are like the head of a family, we should all follow their decisions; if the government is constantly monitored and supervised by the legislature, it cannot possibly accomplish great things; the harmony of the community will be disrupted if people organize lots of groups; and when judges decide important cases, they should accept the view of the executive branch.

We can also compare the attitude of liberal value holders and non-liberal value holders toward China in Taiwan. In comparison with the non-liberal value holders, the liberal value holders are less likely to have a positive image of China. ABS data shows that 56.7 percent of liberal respondents perceive that China has a negative influence on Taiwan, while only 43.1 percent of non-liberal respondents hold an unfavorable view of China. In the 2015 Democratic Governance Survey, conducted by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy in 2015, 72.9 percent of people who don't endorse the Sunflower Movement agree that democracy is the best form of government, while 85.5 percent of those who endorse the movement agree with this statement.<sup>36</sup> These attitude patterns suggest that people who endorse democratic principles or democracy are more likely to see the expansion of China's influence as a threat and thereby tend to support the anti-China protests.

The attitudes toward China and the establishment also exhibit a generational gap. The fourth wave ABS shows that 36 percent of the young generation thinks the influence China has on Taiwan is positive, while 44 percent of adult respondents think so.<sup>37</sup> The young generation has less of a shared cultural identity and fewer familial ties with people in China. Related to this, as the young generation did not experience rapid economic development under authoritarian rule, they are less likely to view authoritarian rule as a viable option to promote development. Instead, they see authoritarian rule as a threat to their freedom. Along with the bleak economic outlook they face, attitudes toward China are the main reasons that the young generation disapproves of President Ma's approach in managing the cross-strait relationship. This factor contributes to the anti-establishment voices among the youth.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, when witnessing the patronage and vote-buying practices of many KMT candidates, large KMT party assets, the primacy of economic growth over environmental protection, rising income inequality, and the pension system that favors civil servants, military, and education personnel, liberal value holders are more likely than not to endorse change in the existing policies. More importantly, they see the trade deals between Taiwan and China as an existential threat to Taiwan's nascent democracy. Since the perceived stakes and the threat of China are both so high, those who hold an unfavorable view of China are more likely to demand strong supervision of the government. We can also use the Fourth Wave ABS to examine this pattern. This battery of questions includes whether the legislature is capable of keeping government leaders in check, and between elections, whether the

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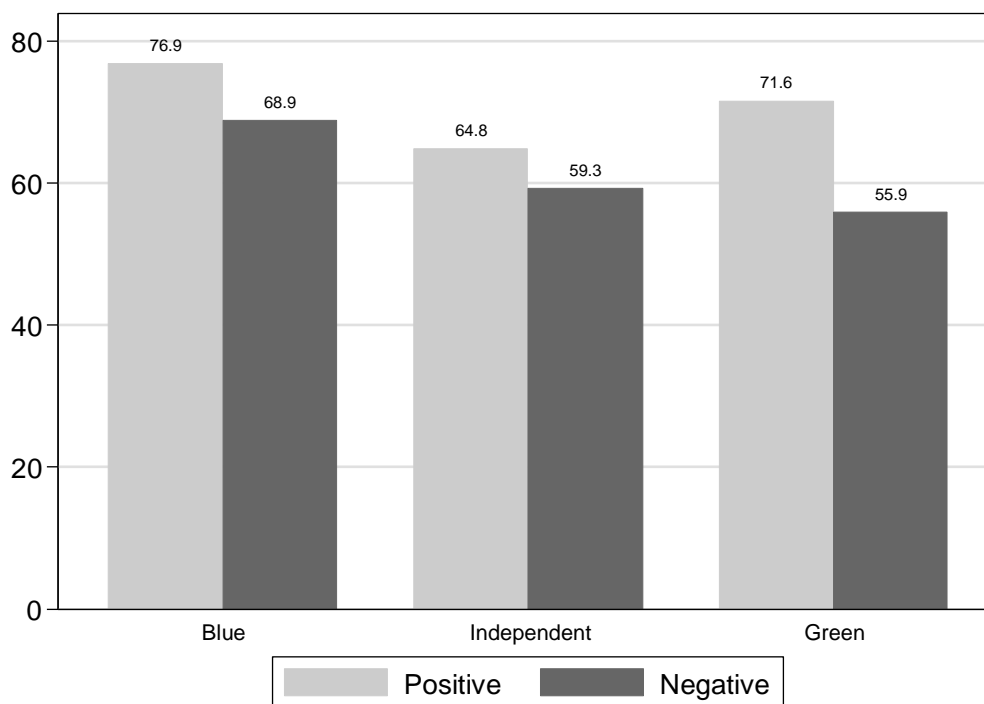
<sup>36</sup> Yu, Chen-hua. *Evaluation of Democratic Governance in Taiwan Survey Report*. Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Asian Barometer Survey Fourth Wave, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> The recent elections saw a pronounced generational gap in party support. For example, in the 2016 presidential election, 73 percent of voters under the age of 30 voted for the opposition candidate, Tsai Ing-wen. Only 15 percent of young voters voted for the KMT candidate. In contrast, 59 percent of adult voters supported Tsai Ing-wen and 29 percent of this age cohort voted for the KMT candidate.

people have a way of holding the government responsible for its actions. As shown in Figure 2, across different parties, people who hold an unfavorable view of China are not satisfied with the state of supervision of the government.<sup>39</sup>

**Figure 2.** Views of China and Perceived Democratic Supervision



Unit: percentage; Data Source: Asian Barometer Wave 4

Moreover, using the ABS, we find that those who hold an unfavorable view of China are more likely to perceive that the government abuses its power. Specifically, they tend to believe that the government blocks information from ordinary people, it does not respond to what people want, and that government leaders break the law or abuse their power. In addition, in another question, people who hold an unfavorable view of China are less satisfied with the overall functioning of democracy. In a nutshell, the perceived negative influence of China on the region and Taiwan is associated with an inferior assessment of the quality of democratic supervision and democratic governance.

### *The Influence of Populism upon Democracy*

#### **Contributions of the Populist Movement**

As the literature has shown, the main threat of the top-down model of populist movements is that political leaders endorse democracy but not liberal democracy. The political elite tend to distrust representative democracy and the idea of checks and balances. In contrast, Taiwan's populism is formed by autonomous civil society

<sup>39</sup> Moreover, this group is likely to be less satisfied with the overall functioning of democracy.

organizations which have launched several social movements. These movements have over time given rise to new political forces: the White Force and the NPP. As a bottom-up model of populism, Taiwan's populism does not pose a threat to liberal democracy. All parties in Taiwan firmly believe in the superiority of democracy and embrace democratic principles. The KMT, the DPP, the WF, and the NPP have no intention of interrupting existing democratic norms. Both the NPP and the WF were absorbed into the existing political system by participating in elections and following democratic rules. At the individual level, as discussed above, popular support for liberal democracy in Taiwan is very high compared to other East Asian countries. Most populist supporters in Taiwan are liberal value holders and more likely to believe in the superiority of democracy. It is the threat from a closer KMT-Beijing relationship that sparks their fears. This movement in part aims to protect Taiwan's democracy by forcing the government not to make deals with the communist regime and to pass the Supervision Act to regulate future trade negotiations. Those who strongly believe in liberal democratic values tend to feel the threat most forcibly. They ask for direct democracy and strong supervision of the government. In addition, a liberal orientation is also associated with a greater emphasis on equality and environmental protection. The populist issues essentially are associated with protecting and deepening democracy, so this movement is unlikely to damage democracy.

In 2017, the ruling DPP tried to initiate the National Public Security Act to counter pressure from China.<sup>40</sup> Many DPP legislators think that China's penetration of Taiwan poses a serious threat to Taiwan's autonomy. This proposed act raises concerns about the control of civil society by the state. The government has proposed setting up many security units in various public and private organizations to report, question, and interview suspects who engage in activities that may threaten national security. In addition, the ruling party legislators have proposed an act to regulate fake news both related and unrelated to national security. If passed, this law would allow the government to regulate speech they do not like in the name of attacking fake news. These initiatives pose a potential threat to the freedom of speech. Many people, including civil society organizations, oppose the bill.<sup>41</sup> Civil society organizations that endorsed the DPP in the 2016 presidential election have gone against the proposal. They worry that these laws give the government too much power to regulate ideas they do not like. In short, the bottom-up model clearly shows that civil society organizations that initiate populist movements are also firmly willing to prevent the government from abusing its power.

Moreover, the populist movement in the past few years has made significant contributions to Taiwan's political and social development. First, it has expanded citizen political participation. Mayor Ko introduced i-voting, participatory budgets, and open data schemes to enhance civic participation in decision making. The NPP has promoted direct democracy such as reducing the quorum for referendums and recalls, and encouraged youth political participation by reducing the voting age to eighteen. Second, this movement contributes to a level playing field for political competition. It led to the third peaceful transition of power in Taiwan that forced out the KMT government, which in turn led to a series of reforms that focused on tackling the KMT's huge party assets and addressing financial transparency for several types of civic organizations such as religious groups. On the socio-

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<sup>40</sup> Apple Daily. "KMT: Users' Accounts were Suspended for Criticizing the President. It Is Likely Due to Malicious Reporting." *Apple Daily*, June 21, 2017. Retrieved on June 21, 2017, from <http://www.appledaily.com.tw/realtimenews/article/new/20170621/1144704/>.

<sup>41</sup> For example, the Taiwan Association for Human Rights expresses such views.



economic front, this movement advocates several progressive social issues such as raising public awareness of social justice, inequality, and human rights. This movement also contributes to environmental protection such as stopping the sprawl of industrial zones and protecting the natural habitats of endangered species. In addition, when the DPP took office, with the help of many CSOs, it began to address the issue of transitional justice associated with Taiwan's authoritarian past. The NPP is also a leading advocate of transitional justice and intergenerational justice. These are all important and progressive policy initiatives.

### **Potential Negative Influence**

This populist movement, however, also has some potential negative impacts on the functioning and governance of Taiwan's democracy. These impacts include interference with the functioning of representative democracy, constraints on the profession of technocrats, and the oversimplification of certain problems, which we will discuss in turn. Because the newly revisited referendum law lowers the quorum requirement, ten referendum cases were voted upon in the 2018 local elections. This number is simply too high for people to understand, digest, and ultimately make decisions on. Moreover, such cases are proposed, deliberated, and voted upon within just two months. The current practice of direct democracy does not allow thorough social deliberation as can be seen in some matured democracies. Taiwan is a divided society with different national identities and views of the cross-strait political and economic relationship. Referendum questions often carry a dichotomous message and provide less room for compromise. For these identity-related issues, it might be better to deliberate and make compromises in representative institutions. Finally, the amended referendum law removes the power of the referendum reviewing committee, making it unable to check whether an initiative violates the constitution or confirm that its wording is understandable.<sup>42</sup> The current referendum practice is an interesting experiment, but the institution needs to be carefully modified.

Also associated with the functioning of representative democracy is the issue of majority rule in the legislature. The occupation of the Parliament during the Sunflower Movement sought to stop China's political and economic infiltration of Taiwan. It did successfully stop the trade agreement about which many civil society organizations were deeply concerned. Representative democracy, however, relies on party discipline and majority control of the legislative agenda to ensure governability. In many Western parliaments, there are motions to end the debate on a matter, limit the amount of time that MPs can spend on a particular bill, and to time-table a bill's progress by setting out the time allowed for debate at each stage in advance.<sup>43</sup> Taiwan's nascent democracy survived the two transfers of power as both parties have demonstrated a willingness to hand over executive power to the opposition when they lose an election. However, neither the DPP nor the KMT were willing to respect the ruling party's legislative power, even in the case of unified government.<sup>44</sup> Despite a majority in the parliament, presidents were still unable to advance their party's policy agenda because of filibustering. During the review of

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<sup>42</sup> Among these cases, three were initiated by the KMT. It essentially became another battleground of partisan competition. The purpose was to boost the party's electoral performance.

<sup>43</sup> For example, the UK parliament has the Guillotine motion and the Program motion.

<sup>44</sup> Yun-han Chu & Chin-en Wu. "State of Democracy in Asia: Taiwan" in *State of Democracy in Asia Report*. Asian Democracy Research Network, 2017.

the service trade agreement, without the presence of a filibuster launched by the opposition party, the so-called black box review or thirty-second review surely would not have happened. The unstoppable filibuster and occupation of the Parliament clearly damaged representative decision-making. The revised recall vote law has a similar problem in that it induces the legislators not to follow party discipline to pass some tough reform bills.

Weak control of legislative power by the ruling party in a united government hurts the governability of the democracy. As Galston points out, gridlock is an important reason that people are losing their confidence in representative democracy as weak governance increases popular discontent with the existing political system.<sup>45</sup> This situation points to a dilemma that Taiwan faces. On the one hand, it needs to ensure majority rule to enhance governability. When checks and balances are pushed to an extreme, they weaken democratic governability. On the other hand, the threat from China is looming and real, and civil society by and large is not comfortable with a closer economic relationship between Taiwan and China. Therefore, people demand greater supervision of the government. To be sure, Taiwan's electoral competition is not a level playing field. Vote-buying and huge party assets give the KMT a decided edge. Only when Taiwan reaches a politically level playing field will it be legitimate to demand majority rule. The majority rule in Parliament improved after the DPP gained control of both the executive and legislative branches after 2016. It has begun to pass several laws by exerting its majority power. This may set a precedent for future governments.

Next, Mayor Ko's indictment of the former mayor compelled society to further investigate the existing BOT cases and to deliberate on a better bidding mechanism. However, Ko's investigation of the five BOT scandals did not turn up enough evidence of corruption. This damaged the technocrat professionals and the city government's credibility to recruit investment. The expansion of the direct democracy initiatives proposed by Ko aims to expand civic participation in decision making, breaking the monopoly of technocrats and elected politicians. However, the limits of their application need to be considered carefully. Some public projects are highly complicated and technical, such as the public works BOT projects, so i-voting may not always be the best way to decide such policies. Mayor Ko proposing to let citizens decide the bidding process of a USD 2.5 billion BOT project is probably not practical. Allowing citizens to decide the bidding process including the qualifications of the bidders, bid procedure, technology requirements, and the bid price no doubt creates tension between civil participation and technocratic governance regarding these technical and sophisticated issues.

Finally, just like in other populist movements, populist politicians in Taiwan also tend to identify the enemies of the people and oversimplify problems. By doing so, Taiwanese society risks omitting the true structural problems it needs to address. Over the past decade, it is argued that the failure of representative democracy, political elites, and big corporations, many of which invest heavily in China, have rigged the economy and weakened Taiwan's democracy. There was indeed rampant crony capitalism, bribe taking, party-controlled enterprises, and monopolies before the first party turnover in 2000. These conditions significantly improved in the mid-2010s. The concerns over rising income inequality and equality of opportunity are fair and important. But aside from these, one may not solely attribute the economic stagnation in Taiwan in recent years to the flaws of representative democracy and to the close economic relationship between Taiwan and China. As discussed above, representative

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<sup>45</sup> William A. Galston. "The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy." *Journal of Democracy*, 29(2) (2018): 5-19.

democracy in Taiwan has its own problems with deep partisan antagonism, gridlock in parliament, and vote-buying in elections, but direct democracy also has its limitations. In some cases, it is the weak grasp on legislative power by the ruling party that hurts governability. Taiwan needs to address this aspect as well.

Next, the cross-strait economic relationship is just part of the global competition Taiwan faces. Taiwan's economy has for a long time relied on original equipment manufacturers that supply components and depended on the technology and machinery from more advanced countries. It faces competition from developing countries and has achieved only partial success in catching up and establishing its own brands. The manufacturing sector over the years has moved offshore to Mainland China and other low-cost countries. Companies focus on expansion (for example, building new factories in China and Vietnam) rather than upgrading their own technology. Furthermore, Taiwan's government overly regulates and intervenes in the market, for example by subsidizing energy fuel prices. In short, the populist movement proposes an easy answer by identifying and attacking enemies, but it often fails to propose actual plausible solutions. Moreover, by doing so it tends to overlook the more important structural factors that a country needs to address to boost the economy.

### ***Conclusion***

Taiwan features a bottom-up model of populism. Taiwan's populist movement is organized by autonomous civil society organizations. This movement has given rise to new political forces, the White Force and the New Power Party. The movement rejects the KMT's handling of cross-strait management, economic development, distributive justice, and environmental management. It is widely believed among civil society that the KMT, domestic big business, and Taiwanese companies that invest heavily in China form a coalition that has rigged the economy and is trying to weaken Taiwan's democracy. Civil society organizations have staged several large-scale protests and were able to successfully block several government policies. As a bottom-up model, this movement has helped introduce several political reforms to level the political playing field and increase civic participation in decision making. In addition, a unique feature of Taiwan's populism is that this movement in large part stems from fears over a close economic relationship between a small democracy and a great authoritarian power. Some of those who feel the threat most strongly are those who are liberal-minded. They seek to protect Taiwan's democracy by forcing the government not to make any deals with a communist government. Popular support for liberal democracy is also high in Taiwan. The source of the populist movement and its bottom-up characteristics mean that this movement is unlikely to influence the stability of the country's democracy. Instead, this movement has in the past few years made significant contributions to Taiwan's political and social development. This populist movement, however, also has some potential negative impacts on the functioning and governance of democracy. These related issues include the functioning of representative democracy, technocratic governance, and oversimplification of the true problems.

Threats related to the inflow of capital and emigration from China have triggered a populist movement. There is a fundamental dilemma facing Taiwan, namely that Taiwan's economy is inextricably intertwined with the Chinese economy. Taiwan exports strategic components to China where they are assembled to be consumed locally or exported to another part of the world. Without the huge trade surplus from China, Taiwan would have a

trade deficit. But on the other hand, China is not a democracy and it has not given up on the possibility of using military force to bring Taiwan into the fold. Hence, the rise of China poses a threat to democracy in Taiwan. Even though Taiwan's government wants to diversify its export market, it has not been too successful. The two sides have developed a "frenemy" (friend + enemy) relationship. The emergence of a more assertive China and the tightening of controls under President Xi are incompatible with the liberal democratic values of Taiwan.

Finally, Taiwan is also a divided society. Views of cross-strait economic policies, filibusters in parliament, history textbook revisions, and several massive social protests have been highly divided along party lines in recent years. A broad and inclusive definition of "the people" is a better approach for the health of democracy. For example, political leaders should define and interpret the "Taiwanese people" broadly, including people with different national identities and unification-independence preferences.

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