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The Landscape of Populist Content and Style on Facebook during Taiwan's 2020 Election: Examining Their Manifestations, Communication Mechanisms, Inter-Party Differences, and Linkages to Electoral Agenda-Setting

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Hongqin Cheng¹ 

Abstract

While some literature examines populism in Taiwan, current Taiwan-specific literature offers limited insight into the extent of populist messaging on social media election campaigns, its communication mechanisms and internal structure, inter-party differences in its application, and its relationship with election topics. To address these significant gaps, this paper analyses Facebook campaign messages of seven candidates/leaders from different Taiwanese political parties during the 2020 election using quantitative content analysis. This paper contributes by: (a) establishing a reliable framework for measuring populist content and style in Taiwan; (b) identifying negative and confrontational inclinations in minor parties' populist communication; (c) uncovering a moderate correlation between populist content and style in Taiwan, with systematic engagements of negativity and emotionality; and (d) revealing significant associations between populist content and

¹School of Information, Journalism and Communication, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

Corresponding Author:

Hongqin Cheng, School of Information, Journalism and Communication, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK.

Email: hongqin.cheng0914@gmail.com



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style and election topics, as well as different tendencies across parties in leveraging these elements to frame the electoral agenda.

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Keywords

Populism, Taiwan, election, Facebook, communication

Introduction

Despite an extensive body of research on populism in European and American contexts, the existing literature has paid insufficient attention to the phenomenon of populism in the Greater China region (He et al., 2021), especially in Taiwan (Klein et al., 2025). Nevertheless, some scholars have contributed to understanding Taiwan's populism. They describe its characteristics through ethnic and national identity (Shyu, 2008), civil groups' opposition to authoritarian legacies (Wu and Chu, 2021), populist leaders' anti-elitist discourses (Krumbein, 2023), and the influence of neoliberalism (Hsu, 2024).

Given the evolving nature of populism, it is necessary to re-examine its characteristics in Taiwan. Although various parties are considered to be associated with populism (Hu and Chiang, 2020; Norris, 2020; Shen, 2017), the literature lacks a systematic examination and comparison of their election campaign messages on social media. More importantly, no research has directly explained how populist content and style are constructed by these parties. Therefore, significant gaps remain concerning whether, to what extent, and how political actors and parties differ in their application of populist content and style on social media during elections. In this regard, I raise four research questions (RQs):

RQ1: To what extent are populist content and style present in presidential candidates and party leaders' Facebook posts during the 2020 election?

RQ2: How does the presence of populist content and style on Facebook differ across political parties during the 2020 election?

RQ3: What is the relationship between populist content and style within populist communication on Facebook during the 2020 election?

RQ4: How are political parties' populist content and style on Facebook during the election associated with election campaign topics?

By addressing the above RQs, this paper addresses several gaps in the literature. It first verifies an analytical framework for measuring populist content and style in Taiwan's context. It then confirms the surge of populism in Taiwanese political parties' Facebook election campaigns and reveals significant inter-party differences. Finally, it explores how populist content and style form a robust structure on Facebook, and examines how parties use these strategies in relation to election topics.

Populist Content and Style

Populism is still a contested concept (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018). There are numerous approaches to interpreting populism. For example, Weyland (2021) claims that populism is a social movement and a class struggle against “the elites.” Mudde (2004) asserts that populism is a “thin ideology” concerning a Manichean antagonism between “the people” and “the elites.” By contrast, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) illustrate that populism is a “political communication style” that involves confrontation among “the people,” “the elites,” and “excluded others.” However, as Aslanidis (2016) and Rueda (2021) argue, the “political-strategic” approach (Weyland, 2021) and the “thin ideology” approach (Mudde, 2004) have limitations. For example, the “thin ideology” approach inevitably causes conceptual ambiguity in the concept of populism (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014) and creates difficulties in theoretical extension (Aslanidis, 2016). Meanwhile, the “political-strategic” approach underestimates the role of the citizens and voters in populist communication and ignores “the people” at the heart of populism (Rueda, 2021). Among these approaches, I selected the “communication” approach that argues that populism is a political communication style/strategy that aims at constructing antagonism between “the people” and “the elites/excluded others” (De Vreese et al., 2018). This approach enables us to measure the phenomenon of populism, operationalised through the frequency of using populist content or style (De Vreese et al., 2018). Specifically, populist content means what populism says/constructs concerning “the people,” “the elites,” or “the excluded others,” and populist style means how populist messages are delivered (Cassell, 2023) (Table 1).

Regarding populist content, “the people” is a homogeneous and abstract label because “the people” is substantially an empty claim (Laclau, 2005). By contrast, “the elites” are interpreted as occupying a higher social class than “the people,” and hindering, exploiting, and stealing from “the people’s interests” (Laclau, 2005). Similarly, “the excluded others” refer to individuals or groups that share a similar socio-economic status with the general population but are excluded or ostracised and blamed for the socio-economic problems faced by “the people” (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007).

Based on the above concepts, populist content can be specified as four dimensions (Ernst et al., 2019; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007): “appeals to popular sovereignty” emphasises the power of “the people” (Mudde, 2004); “people-centrism” means that “the people” are always good and should be at the centre (Mudde, 2004); “anti-elitism” is understood as opposing “the elites” who are always bad and against “the people” (Mudde, 2004); and “exclusion of others” targets non-elite groups who are against “the people” (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007).

Based on a review of populism-related literature, I identified more detailed coding variables for each dimension of populist content. The dimension “popular sovereignty” is coded from three aspects: “demanding popular sovereignty,” which emphasises the right of “the people” to more power and political participation (Mudde, 2004); “denying elite sovereignty,” which calls for monitoring and limiting elite power (Ernst et al., 2019);

Table 1. Summary of Coding Variables in Populist Content and Style.

Populist Communication	Dimensions	Variables	
Populist content	Popular sovereignty	Demanding popular sovereignty Denying “elite sovereignty” Invoking the heartland	
	People-centrism	Stressing “the people’s virtues” Praising “the people’s achievements” Stating a “monolithic people” Demonstrating closeness to “the people”	
	Anti-elitism	Discrediting “the elite” Blaming “the elite” Detaching “the elite” from “the people”	
	Exclusion of others	Dangerous others Authoritarian tendencies	
	Populist style	Negativity	Negativism Crisis rhetoric
		Emotionality	Emotional tone Absolutism Patriotism
		Sociability	Colloquialism Intimisation

and “invoking the heartland,” which appeals to rebuild the nice things lost now after popular sovereignty declines (Engesser et al., 2017).

The dimension “people-centrism” is coded from four aspects. The first, “stressing the people’s virtues,” attributes good moral qualities to “the people” (Canovan, 1999). The second, “praising the people’s achievements,” credits “the people” with all good results (Mudde, 2004). The third, “stating a monolithic people,” describes “the people” as sharing the same feelings, values, and positions (Canovan, 1999). The fourth, “demonstrating closeness to the people,” involves populists claiming to represent and originate from “the people” (Laclau, 2005).

The dimension “anti-elitism” is coded from three aspects. The first, “discrediting the elite,” describes “the elite” as morally bad (Mudde, 2004). The second, “blaming the elite,” criticises “the elite” as a burden and threat to the public (Canovan, 1999). The third, “detaching the elite from the people,” identifies “the elites” as separate from and unrepresentative of “the people” (Müller, 2017).

The dimension “exclusion of others” is coded in two ways. The first, “dangerous others,” depicts particular social groups as threats similar to “the elites” (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). The second, “authoritarian tendencies,” critiques particular groups’ potential authoritarian actions and thoughts (Bracciale and Martella, 2017).

The above textual content-based approach resonates with Hawkins (2009), who primarily focuses on political speeches in Latin American populism. By contrast, my

framework extends this by shifting to Taiwan's context, which simultaneously integrates populist content and style to offer a more comprehensive understanding of populist communication on social media.

Similarly, populist style consists of three dimensions based on populism-related literature, encompassing "negativity," "emotionality," and "sociability" (Bracciale and Martella, 2017; Ernst et al., 2019).

The dimension "negativity" is coded from two aspects. "Negativism" is the negative characterisation of a particular group or condemnation of the potential negative consequences of its actions (Ernst et al., 2019). "Crisis rhetoric" uses exaggeration, urgent rhetoric, and scandalous statements to portray a situation as an inevitable crisis (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014).

The dimension "emotionality" is coded from three aspects. "Emotional tone" refers to presenting negative or positive discrete emotion words, such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and so forth (Hameleers et al., 2017). "Absolutism" involves particular modal verbs, adjectives, and adverbs for expressing absolute approval or opposition, such as must, have to, surely, inevitable, and so forth (Wettstein et al., 2019). "Patriotism" asserts a country's superiority (Ernst et al., 2019).

The dimension "sociability" is coded from two aspects. "Colloquialism" refers to using dialects, online memes, nicknames, and foul language to convey messages (Bracciale and Martella, 2017; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). "Intimisation" means attracting social media users by telling private details of public figures' lives (Ernst et al., 2019).

The above elements/variables are vital because quantifying their occurrence allows for a more precise measurement and comparison of populist content and style across various political spectrums, actors, parties, and contexts (De Vreese et al., 2018).

Populism in Taiwan

Taiwan's populism differs from its European and American counterparts in two key aspects: (a) historical background and (b) political spectrum. Regarding (a), European and American populism is largely rooted in anti-globalisation, anti-immigration sentiment, and class-based discontent (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018). In contrast, Taiwan's populism is intertwined with discussions about restoring Taiwanese subjectivity and its relationship with mainland China (Krumbein, 2023). Hence, Taiwan's populism extends beyond the traditional European and American views of "the people" versus "the elite"; it also encompasses moral opposition to the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and mainland China (Wu and Chu, 2021). This anti-China stance has also shaped (b), a unique political spectrum in Taiwan: pro-China versus anti-China. This dichotomy has led to the formation of a pro-China blue coalition (藍營, *lanying*) led by the KMT and a pro-independence green coalition (綠營, *lüying*) led by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) (Fell, 2006). This allows for comparing differences in Taiwan's populism through the lens of reunification and independence, rather than solely through the left-right wings in European and American populism.

Despite its connection to China factors, Taiwan's populism differs from that in mainland China and Hong Kong. In mainland China, populism manifests as an online grass-roots discourse against "social elites" (He et al., 2021), and in Hong Kong, it appears as journalists employing a populist style to contrast the rich government with "the poor people" (Tang, 2017). Unlike these regions, Taiwan's populism is characterised by bottom-up social movements against the KMT's authoritarian legacy (Wu and Chu, 2021) and intense political party rivalries. Therefore, understanding Taiwan's populism not only clarifies the role of China-related issues within it but also helps those interested in contemporary Greater China appreciate the variations of populism across regions sharing the same language and ethnicity. This understanding further encourages reflection on populist phenomena elsewhere in Greater China.

Taiwan's populism spans from the first decade of the twenty-first century to today. Around the first decade of the twenty-first century, as Shyu (2008) argues, Taiwan's electoral politics gradually gave rise to a populist culture. Beginning with the 2000 election, this trend prompted Taiwan's political parties and actors to raise populist issues rather than engage in rational policy debates typically expected under democratic elections. Subsequently, populism has developed in parallel with, and was even reinforced by, Taiwan's blossoming democracy into the 2010s. For example, a range of social movements relying on Taiwanese democratic consciousness-driven resistance emerged during Ma Ying-jeou's KMT government period from 2008 to 2016 (Hsu, 2017). The case is the 2014 Sunflower Movement, which opposed a new mainland-Taiwan trade agreement and described Beijing and the KMT as an "evil elite" undermining the Taiwanese "people's democracy and freedom" (Hsu, 2017). At the same time, populist messages and ideas were largely produced and disseminated through the media, which have long been a vehicle for populism in Taiwan (Lin and Lee, 2021). Concerning the characteristics brought by Taiwan's citizens and media, Wu and Chu (2021) suggest that Taiwan's populism is a spontaneous social movement against the KMT's authoritarian legacy within the bottom-up civil society. By the time the 2020s arrived, Taiwan-related political literature suggested that populism had reached its peak in Taiwan. In this regard, an example is the "Han Kuo-yu phenomenon." This phenomenon was caused by the KMT's 2018 Kaohsiung mayor candidate and 2020 presidential candidate, Han Kuo-yu, who is considered to have employed anti-elitist populism in his election campaigns (Krumbein, 2023), is a typical example. It has directly led to a spectacle concerning the "elite establishment," which is responsible for the recession, versus Han Kuo-yu, who promises to lead the poor to prosperity (Krumbein, 2023). This spectacle even created a significant surprise in his success as mayor of Kaohsiung City, a race where most observers saw no hope for either the KMT or him (Krumbein, 2023).

During the rise of populism in Taiwan, as Cheng (2025) has identified, economic anxiety and cultural backlash are two key drivers, with China factors embedded in them. Economic anxiety refers to economic insecurity and dependence on mainland China's market (Cheng, 2025), which led to intense rivalry between the DPP and KMT. Specifically, the KMT used the economic opportunities in the mainland's market to construct the antagonism between the Taiwanese "people" and the DPP, while the DPP used the risk of Taiwan's sovereignty to

construct the antagonism between the Taiwanese “people” and the KMT and mainland (Cheng, 2025). These China factors also manifested in cultural backlash. Cultural backlash refers to the repositioning of Taiwanese collective identity, which opposed Chinese identity and influence. This was promoted from Peng Ming-min’s 1964 Declaration of Formosan Self-salvation (台灣自救運動宣言, *taiwan zijiū yundong xuanyan*), Lee Teng-hui’s “new Taiwanese” (新台灣人, *xin taiwan ren*) identity, and Chen Shui-bian’s adoption of the romanisation spelling system to diminish Mandarin’s influence, to Tsai Ing-wen’s revision of history curricula to exclude Chinese influence (Cheng, 2025).

All the above examples support the idea that there is a distinctive and all-around phenomenon of populism in Taiwan. In this respect, the 2020 election (simultaneous presidential and legislative elections) stands out because it has been labelled as the “explosion” of populism in Taiwan given the “Han Kuo-yu phenomenon” (Krumbein, 2023) and its ties to the Hong Kong (HK) protest (Ponce and Wang, 2021). Meanwhile, the 2020 election is considered an election in which campaign text and discourse had a significant influence on the election results (Krumbein, 2023). It was also the first campaign in which social media, especially Facebook, is said to have been used extensively by all Taiwanese presidential candidates and party leaders according to the report of the Asian Network for Free Elections (2020). Conceptually, social media are key to promoting the production and dissemination of populist content and styles (De Vreese et al., 2018). Hence, considering that Facebook occupied the highest position in the number of social media sign-ups and usage in Taiwan (Taiwan Network Information Center, 2019: 20) and has formed the main campaign battleground of the 2020 election (Lin et al., 2023), I raised RQ1.

Also, the literature still lacks sufficient knowledge about how political actors and parties practice populist content and style on Facebook during the election in Taiwan. Specifically, this lack of knowledge is reflected in the differences in the presentation of party-based populist content and style, and the relationship between populist content and style in Taiwan’s context. Hence, I raised RQ2 regarding differences in presence, and RQ3 regarding the relationship between populist content and style.

Besides, Chen et al. (2022) identified the following ten key and popular topics in the 2020 election, reflecting the economic anxiety and cultural backlash discussed above. These include: (a) one country, two systems, (b) nuclear power, (c) HK protests, (d) Taiwan’s marriage equality, (e) Taiwan’s pension reform, (f) Taiwan’s youth poverty, (g) Taiwan’s labour reform, (h) China–US trade war, (i) Anti-Infiltration Act in Taiwan, and (j) fake information (it refers to misinformation and disinformation during the 2020 election, often concerning the keywords “fake news,” “cyber-army,” “rumour,” and “inaccurate information” [Chen et al., 2022]). However, existing literature does not clarify if and how populist content and style on Facebook by different parties were associated with these key election topics. Hence, I raised RQ4.

Research Method

The data in this paper is the election campaign Facebook posts published on the public Facebook pages of seven presidential candidates and party leaders from seven different

Table 2. Summary of Two-Month Data Collection.

Political Actor	Political Party	Facebook Public Page	Number of Facebook Posts
Tsai Ing-wen	Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)	Tsai Ing-wen	225
Han Kuo-yu	Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT)	Han Kuo-yu	187
James Soong	People First Party (PFP)	James Soong Looking for Friends	134
Ko Wen-je	Taiwan People's Party (TPP)	Ko Wen-je	133
Hsu Yung-ming	New Power Party (NPP)	Hsu Yung-ming	95
Chen Yi-chi	Taiwan Statebuilding Party (TSP)	Chen Yichi-Shin-ichi	529
Yok Mu-ming	New Party (NP)	Yok Mu-ming Observation Station	57

Taiwanese political parties. I selected them because the first-past-the-post mixed system in Taiwan’s elections has significant party-oriented features (Tsai, 2017) and party leaders and presidential candidates are highly representative of their affiliated political parties (Ernst et al., 2017). The seven presidential candidates and party leaders are listed in Table 2. The seven parties have been identified to be associated with populism by an expert survey of the Global Parties’ Populist Index (Norris, 2020) and Taiwan-related literature (Hu and Chiang, 2020; Shen, 2017). Although some of them did not nominate a presidential candidate (e.g. the New Power Party [NPP] and Taiwan Statebuilding Party [TSP]) or did not win seats in the Legislative Yuan (e.g. the New Party [NP]) in the 2020 election, the seven parties span the political spectrum from independence to reunification (Hsiao et al., 2017) and actively participated in the 2020 election campaigns. This broad scope is crucial for capturing the multi-dimensional landscape of populist communication among Taiwan’s political parties, which helps in understanding diverse populist manifestations across the political spectrum. While including the NP ($N = 57$) and NPP ($N = 95$) ensures a broad political spectrum, their relatively small sample sizes limit the statistical power of their respective analyses. Therefore, statistical findings related to the NP and NPP should be interpreted as exploratory or descriptive.

Then, I used software Facepager to collect a total of $N = 1,360$ Facebook posts from the seven political actors’ public pages on Facebook over a two-month period, from 11 November 2019 to 11 January 2020 (the voting day), which covered the twenty-eight-day official campaign period required by Taiwan’s election law (Central Election Commission, 1995). To ensure data integrity, I also manually collected all Facebook posts from these public pages and compared the Facepager-collected posts against the manually collected ones to confirm the accurate retrieval of post content and timestamps.

Missing content was corrected and added manually. All collected data, including post IDs, content, and timestamps, were initially stored as .csv files generated by Facepager. During data cleaning, this research standardised the post text by removing special characters and emoji symbols to facilitate subsequent content analysis.

Based on the above data, I conducted a quantitative content analysis. For this purpose, I designed a codebook with nineteen variables for populist content and style. In the section on populist content, we coded 1/0 (yes/no) for twelve binary categorical variables within four dimensions, indicating whether or not there is a presence of particular variables. The values of these twelve variables were combined into the corresponding four dimensions (“popular sovereignty,” “people-centrism,” “anti-elitism,” “exclusion of others”), set as continuous variables. Similarly, in the section on populist style, we coded 1/0 (yes/no) for seven variables as binary categorical variables, indicating the presence or absence of a particular stylistic device. Their values were combined into the corresponding three dimensions (“negativity,” “emotionality,” “sociability”), also set as continuous variables.

All variables were derived from reviewing Taiwan and populism-related academic literature (Bracciale and Martella, 2017; Engesser et al., 2017; Ernst et al., 2019; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). Two coders (including myself) manually coded 10 per cent of the data (De Swert, 2012), which was randomly sampled in R based on numbers corresponding to the Facebook posts. The other coder underwent training by me and, after several rounds of testing, reached acceptable levels of inter-coder reliability (Cohen’s kappa and Krippendorff’s alpha both ≥ 0.80). After reaching acceptable reliability levels, I manually coded the remaining data in two months using NVivo, with the unit of coding set to a single Facebook post that is also the unit of analysis. Besides, given attention to populist-related text in Facebook posts, the coding scope excluded posts consisting only of images or videos. The number of such excluded posts was small $N=97$ and did not have a significant impact on the overall sample.

I used the R programming language to process our coding results. First, I conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of all variables of populist content to confirm the validity between them and the four dimensions in populist content, as well as all variables of populist style and the three dimensions for their validity. Because, on the one hand, the variables of populist content and style are theoretical hypotheses, even though they are reasonable in the literature, they need to be empirically verified. On the other hand, since all variables of populist content and style stem from the European and American contexts, their application in Taiwan’s context needed to be verified for equal effectiveness. In this respect, I examined the factor loadings because they exhibit the strength of the relationship between the four dimensions and twelve variables of populist content and the three dimensions and seven variables of populist style. Among them, factor loadings above 0.4 are generally considered acceptable, while values above 0.3 may also be tolerated in good-fit models (Pituch and Stevens, 2015).

Second, I computed the percentage (%), mean (M), and standard deviation (SD) of the variables for populist content and style for each party. In all figures, the M is presented with error bars. These error bars represent the SD of the variable across all posts to indicate its dispersion.

Third, I computed Pearson correlation coefficients to measure the correlations between the four dimensions of populist content (set as independent variables) and three dimensions of populist style (set as dependent variables) within the same Facebook posts.

Fourth, I computed a logistic regression analysis to reveal to what extent populist content and style are associated with the occurrence probability of particular Taiwan election campaign topics on Facebook. Each dimension of populist content and style was treated as an independent variable. The absence/presence (0/1) of each binary key topic in the 2020 Taiwan election served as the dependent variable according to the topic list verified by Chen et al. (2022). I first set the nominal variable of political parties (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) as a control variable and ran ten separate binary logistic regressions for each of the ten different topics across all parties. Then, I computed separate models for the dimensions of populist content and style by topic within each of the seven different parties.

Findings

Validity of Populist Content and Style in Taiwan's Context

To test the validity between the four dimensions of populist content and their variables in Taiwan's context, I established a validated factor analysis model. The model fitting results showed $\chi^2(48)=167.694$, $p<.001$, comparative fit index (CFI)=0.990, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI)=0.986, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)=0.043 (90 per cent CI [0.036, 0.050]), and standardised root mean square residual (SRMR)=0.095. Both the CFI and TLI indices were above 0.98, indicating a good fit of the model. The RMSEA of 0.043, with an upper limit of its 90 per cent confidence interval of 0.050, further supported the good fit of the model. Although the SRMR of 0.095 was slightly higher than 0.08, the excellent performance of the other values was enough to prove the reliability of this model. The standardised covariances between the latent dimensions ranged from 0.42 to 0.96, suggesting that the four dimensions shared certain common underlying features, consistent with the populism-related literature's theoretical expectation that they all fall under the broader category of populist content. Table 3 presents the standardised factor loadings for these latent dimensions. As shown in Table 3, most of the metrics exhibited high factor loadings on their corresponding latent dimensions, indicating that these metrics adequately reflected their latent constructs.

Similarly, I tested the validity between the three dimensions of populist style and their variables. The results showed a good model fit: $\chi^2(11)=31.839$, $p=.001$, CFI=0.998, TLI=0.996, RMSEA=0.037 (90 per cent CI [0.023, 0.053]), and SRMR=0.043. Both the model fit indices CFI and TLI were close to 1; meanwhile, both the RMSEA and SRMR were below 0.08. These results collectively suggested that the model fitted the data well. The standardised covariances among the three dimensions ranged from 0.53 to 0.88, suggesting that they shared certain common underlying features within populist style. As shown in Table 4, all the indicators presented significant factor loadings on their corresponding latent dimensions. The factor loadings for “negativity” were high

Table 3. Factor Loadings in Populist Content.

Latent Dimensions	Indicators (Variables)	Factor Loadings (Standardised)
Popular sovereignty	Demanding popular sovereignty	0.88
	Denying “elite sovereignty”	0.87
	Invoking the heartland	0.83
People-centrism	Stressing “the people’s virtues”	0.83
	Praising “the people’s achievements”	0.93
	Stating a “monolithic people”	0.99
	Demonstrating closeness to “the people”	0.8
Anti-elitism	Discrediting “the elite”	0.92
	Blaming “the elite”	0.96
	Detaching “the elite” from “the people”	0.91
Exclusion of others	Dangerous others	0.48
	Authoritarian tendencies	0.77

Table 4. Factor Loadings in Populist Style.

Latent Dimensions	Indicators (Variables)	Factor Loadings (Standardised)
Negativity	Negativism	0.89
	Crisis rhetoric	0.94
Emotionality	Emotional tone	0.85
	Absolutism	0.96
	Patriotism	0.78
Sociability	Colloquialism	0.94
	Intimisation	0.36

(“negativism” = 0.89, “crisis rhetoric” = 0.94), indicating that the two were effective in reflecting the dimension “negativity” in Taiwan’s context. The factor loadings for “emotionality” were also significant (“emotional tone” = 0.85, “absolutism” = 0.96, “patriotism” = 0.78), supporting that these three indicators constitute the dimension “emotionality” in Taiwan’s context. However, the relatively low factor loading of the indicator “intimisation” in the dimension “sociability” (0.36) indicated a weak association, suggesting a mediocre applicability of “intimisation” of “sociability” stemming from the European and American context (Ernst et al., 2019) in Taiwan’s context.

Sample Description

To answer RQ1, I measured the presence of populist content and style on the Facebook posts. In total, 46.8 per cent of Taiwanese presidential candidates’ and party leaders’ Facebook posts contained at least one element of populist content during the 2020

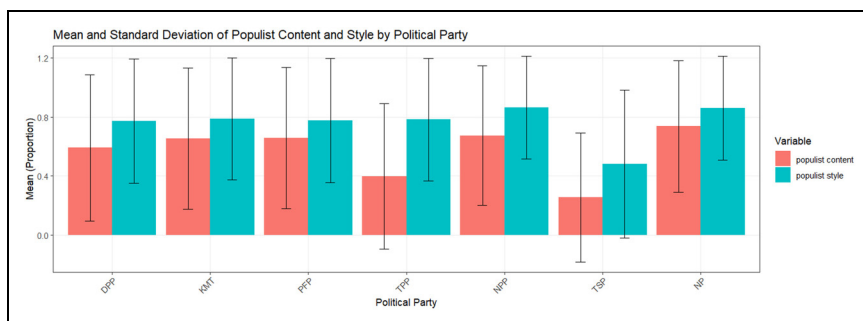


Figure 1. Presentation of populist content and style across political parties.

election. Among them, the dimension “people-centrism” occurred the most (32.8 per cent), significantly higher than “anti-elitism” (19.8 per cent) and “exclusion of others” (19.3 per cent), followed by the least presence of “popular sovereignty” (11.9 per cent).

By contrast, the presence of populist style (67.3 per cent) was significantly more than that of populist content on Facebook. Among them, the dimension “sociability” was present the most (53.3 per cent), followed by “emotionality” (47.2 per cent) and “negativity” (36.6 per cent).

To address RQ2, I further investigated the presence of populist content and style at the level of political parties (Figure 1). In total, all seven parties used populist style significantly more than populist content on Facebook during the 2020 election. The presence of populist content showed significant fluctuations in different parties’ Facebook posts. Among them, populist content was present the most in the NP’s Facebook posts (73.7 per cent, $M=0.737$, $SD=0.444$), followed by the NPP (67.4 per cent, $M=0.674$, $SD=0.471$), People First Party (PFP) (65.7 per cent, $M=0.657$, $SD=0.477$), KMT (65.2 per cent, $M=0.652$, $SD=0.477$), DPP (59.1 per cent, $M=0.591$, $SD=0.493$), Taiwan People’s Party (TPP) (39.8 per cent, $M=0.398$, $SD=0.491$), and TSP (25.5 per cent, $M=0.255$, $SD=0.436$).

By contrast, the presence of populist style was rather steady across different parties. Apart from the presence of populist style by the TSP (48.2 per cent, $M=0.482$, $SD=0.5$), the others all exhibited >75 per cent populist style in their Facebook posts, such as the NPP (86.3 per cent, $M=0.863$, $SD=0.346$), NP (86 per cent, $M=0.86$, $SD=0.35$), KMT (78.6 per cent, $M=0.786$, $SD=0.411$), TPP (78.2 per cent, $M=0.782$, $SD=0.414$), PFP (77.6 per cent, $M=0.776$, $SD=0.418$), and DPP (77.3 per cent, $M=0.773$, $SD=0.42$).

At the level of more detailed party-based four dimensions of populist content (Figure 2), the two major parties, namely the DPP (54.7 per cent, $M=0.547$, $SD=0.499$) and KMT (56.1 per cent, $M=0.561$, $SD=0.498$), and the third forces, the PFP (64.9 per cent, $M=0.649$, $SD=0.479$) and TPP (31.6 per cent, $M=0.316$, $SD=0.467$), showed steady and the most applications of “people-centrism” in their populist content on the Facebook posts. By contrast, despite “people-centrism” being also used by the third

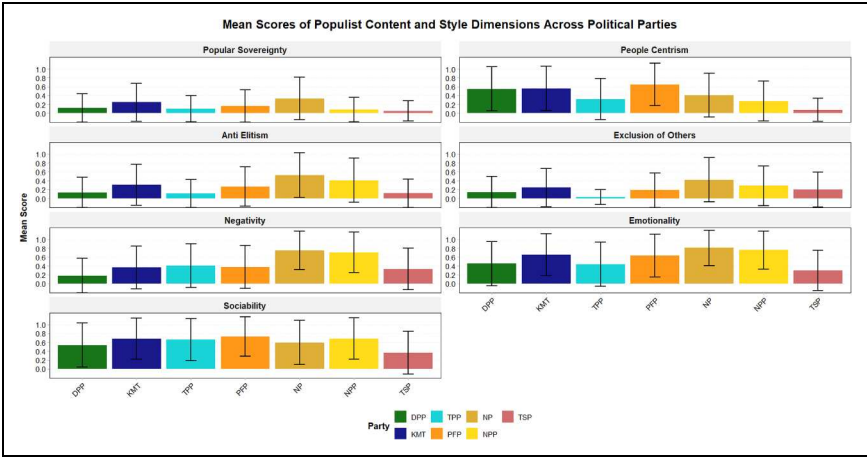


Figure 2. Presentation of specific populist content and style dimensions across political parties.

force NPP (27.4 per cent) and the green coalition’s TSP (7.56 per cent) and the blue coalition’s NP (40.4 per cent), they were more inclined to present “anti-elitism” and “exclusion of others” in their populist content. For example, the NPP (41.1 per cent) and NP (52.6 per cent) used “anti-elitism” the most in their populist content, while the TSP (19.8 per cent) used “exclusion of others” the most.

A similar difference between the DPP/KMT/PFP/TPP and the NPP/TSP/NP showed in the presence of three dimensions of populist style on Facebook. “Negativity” always occurred the least and had wide fluctuations in the DPP (18.2 per cent, $M=0.182$, $SD=0.387$), KMT (36.9 per cent, $M=0.369$, $SD=0.484$), PFP (37.3 per cent, $M=0.373$, $SD=0.485$), and TPP’s (40.6 per cent, $M=0.406$, $SD=0.493$) applications of populist style. By contrast, the “negativity” occurred relatively more and steadily in the NPP (70.5 per cent, $M=0.705$, $SD=0.458$), TSP (32.9 per cent, $M=0.329$, $SD=0.47$), and NP (75.4 per cent, $M=0.754$, $SD=0.434$) applications of populist style on Facebook. Compared to the variation of “negativity” across the parties, the presence of “emotionality” and “sociability” by different parties all remained high frequency and steady. For example, “emotionality” presented the highest in the NP’s (80.7 per cent, $M=0.807$, $SD=0.398$) Facebook posts with rather little fluctuation in the distribution.

Correlations between Populist Content and Style in Taiwan

To answer RQ3, I analysed the correlations between populist content and style (Figure 3). Overall, a moderate correlation was found ($r=.646$, $p<.001$). Specifically, the stylistic dimension “emotionality” exhibited consistent moderate correlations ($r=.400$ to $.500$) across all content dimensions. “Negativity” varied, correlating moderately with “anti-



Figure 3. Overall correlations among the various dimensions of populist content and style.

elitism" ($r = .570$, $p < .001$) and "exclusion of others" ($r = .620$, $p < .001$), but weakly with "people-centrism" ($r = .180$, $p < .001$) and "popular sovereignty" ($r = .390$, $p < .001$). Conversely, "sociability" showed consistently weak correlations ($r = .100$ to $.200$). These results suggested that Taiwanese political actors frequently combined populist content with "emotionality" on Facebook, while "negativity" was primarily linked to populist confrontational themes. However, "sociability" was rarely integrated with populist content during the 2020 election.

At the party level, the PFP ($r = .754$, $p < .001$), KMT ($r = .751$, $p < .001$), and TSP ($r = .749$, $p < .001$) exhibited strong overall correlations between content and style, followed by the DPP ($r = .695$, $p < .001$), TPP ($r = .623$, $p < .001$), NP ($r = .511$, $p < .001$), and NPP ($r = .493$, $p < .001$). Regarding specific application patterns (Figure 4), the DPP ($r = .672$, $p < .001$) and TPP ($r = .540$, $p < .001$) showed the strongest links between "people-centrism" and "emotionality." In contrast, "negativity" was the dominant stylistic dimension for the other five parties, correlating with "anti-elitism" for the KMT ($r = .860$, $p < .001$) and PFP ($r = .804$, $p < .001$), with "exclusion of others" for the TSP ($r = .773$, $p < .001$) and NPP ($r = .442$, $p < .001$), and with "popular sovereignty" for the NP ($r = .596$, $p < .001$).

Compared to the prominence of "emotionality" and "negativity" in combining populist content, "sociability" was largely absent. For example, in the DPP's Facebook posts, "sociability" did not show a significant difference with "anti-elitism" ($p = .927$), "exclusion of others" ($p = .051$), or "popular sovereignty" ($p = .733$). Similar examples can be

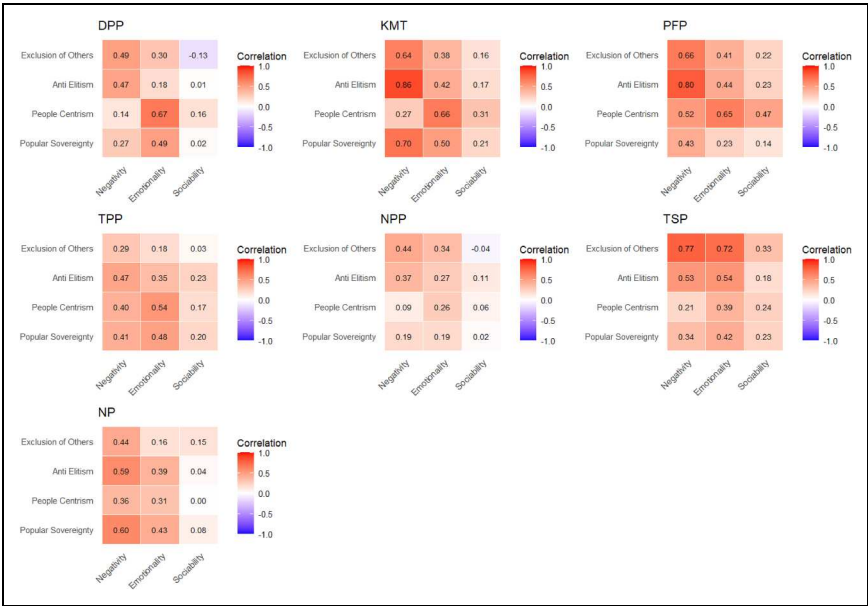


Figure 4. Specific correlations among the various dimensions of populist content and style across political parties.

viewed in the TPP’s use of “exclusion of others” ($p = .707$), the NP’s “exclusion of others” ($p = .279$), “anti-elitism” ($p = .796$), “people-centrism” ($p = .973$), “popular sovereignty” ($p = .553$), and the NPP’s “exclusion of others” ($p = .670$), “anti-elitism” ($p = .268$), “people-centrism” ($p = .566$), “popular sovereignty” ($p = .846$). These results of the in-depth analysis of the party-based data further support the above argument that the “sociability” dimension, encompassing “colloquialism” and “intimisation,” was not systematically or structurally involved in populist communication on Facebook during the 2020 Taiwan election.

Associations between Populist Communication and Election Topics

To address RQ4, I built a logistic regression model and examined to what extent populist content and style were linked to the probability of occurrence for particular topics.

In total, populist content and style were significantly and positively associated with the presence of the election campaign topics “one country, two systems,” “nuclear power,” “HK protests,” “Taiwan’s pension reform,” “Taiwan’s labour reform,” “China–US trade war,” “anti-infiltration,” and “fake information” on Facebook (Figure 5). All ten models shared the same number of observations ($N = 1,263$). This suggested that the logistic regression results stemmed from a consistent sample base, which confirmed

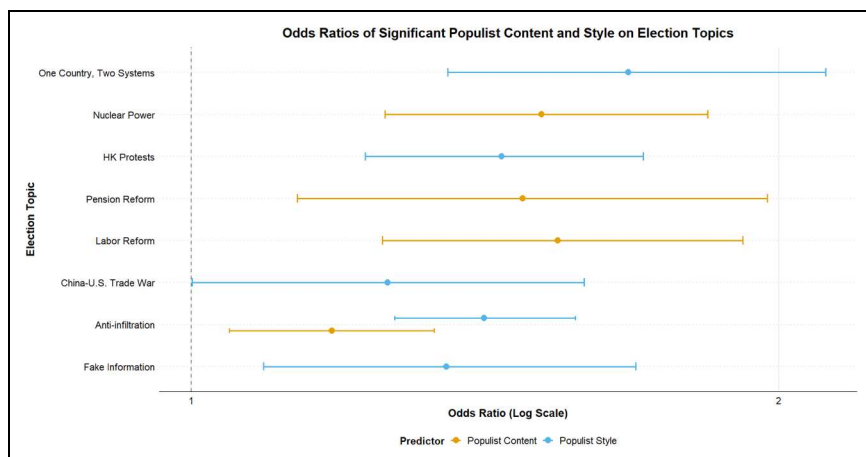


Figure 5. Overall associations between populist content and style and election topics.

the validity of the data cleaning and ensured comparability between models and consistency of the model structure. Also, all models exhibited good Omnibus ($p < .050$) and Hosmer–Lemeshow ($p > .050$) tests, confirming that the overall models had strong explanatory power and goodness of fit.

Specifically, for the dependent variable “one country, two systems,” populist style ($OR = 1.68$, 95 per cent CI [1.35, 2.11], $p < .001$) showed a significant positive association with a significant model fit (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 67.596$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$) and good Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p = .417$). Regarding “nuclear power,” populist content showed a significant positive association ($OR = 1.51$, 95 per cent CI [1.26, 1.84], $p < .001$) with a good model fit (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 64.609$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$) and Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p = .906$). Concerning “HK protests,” populist style ($OR = 1.44$, 95 per cent CI [1.23, 1.70], $p < .001$) had a significant positive relationship, and the model fit was significant (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 62.972$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$) with a good Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p = .194$). For “Taiwan’s pension reform,” populist content demonstrated a significant positive relationship ($OR = 1.48$, 95 per cent CI [1.13, 1.97], $p = .005$) with a significant model fit (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 39.834$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$) and favourable Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p = .536$). Regarding “labour reform,” populist content showed a significant positive association ($OR = 1.54$, 95 per cent CI [1.25, 1.92], $p < .001$) with a significant model fit (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 49.569$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$) and good Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p = .527$). For the “China–US trade war,” populist style was significantly and positively associated ($OR = 1.26$, 95 per cent CI [1.00, 1.59], $p = .047$) with a significant model fit (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 44.971$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$) and good Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p = .217$). Concerning the “Anti-infiltration Act,” both populist content ($OR = 1.18$, 95 per cent CI [1.05, 1.33], $p = .006$) and style ($OR = 1.41$, 95 per cent CI [1.27, 1.57], $p < .001$) showed a significant positive association with a significant model fit (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 206.614$,

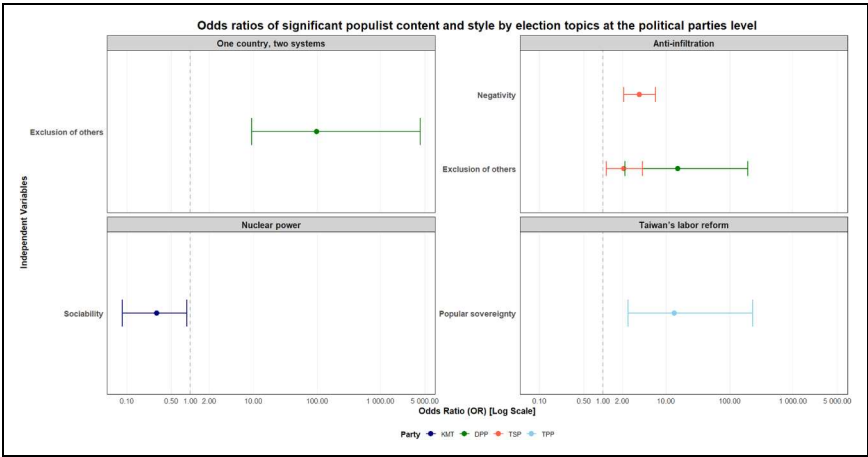


Figure 6. Specific associations between populist content and style and election topics across different political parties.

$df=8, p<.001$) and good Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p=.558$). Finally, for “fake information,” populist style ($OR = 1.35$, 95 per cent CI [1.09, 1.69], $p=.006$) showed a significant positive link with a significant model fit (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 76.762$, $df=8, p<.001$) and good Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p=.629$).

This suggested that populist style had a more widespread and significant association with election topics (“one country two systems,” “HK protests,” “trade war,” “anti-infiltration,” “fake information”) than populist content (“nuclear,” “pension,” “labour,” “anti-infiltration”). Besides, both populist content and style were insignificant for topics “marriage equality” and “youth poverty,” while “anti-infiltration” remained the only topic where both populist content and style were significantly and positively associated.

At the party level, there were seventy models according to ten election topics for seven different parties. Among them, a total of five models, encompassing two models for the DPP ($N=216$), one for the KMT ($N=177$), one for the TPP ($N=125$), and one for the TSP ($N=488$), passed the goodness-of-fit test based on acceptable Omnibus test p -values ($p<.050$) and non-significant Hosmer–Lemeshow test p -values ($p>.050$). The five effective models exhibited six statistically significant OR results (Figure 6). These model results highlighted different patterns of association for populist content/style across parties and topics. In other words, these findings revealed that different political parties strategically employed different dimensions of populist content and style with varying directions and strengths of association when addressing particular election topics.

In the case of the DPP, there was a significant and rather strong positive association between “exclusion of others” and “one country, two systems” ($OR=98.20$, 95 per cent CI [9.29, 4,262.49], $p=.002$) with a good model fit (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 43.96$, $df=7, p=.040$) and good Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p=.996$). Meanwhile, the populist

content “exclusion of others” was significantly and positively related to “anti-infiltration” ($OR = 15.28$, 95 per cent CI [2.26, 193.16], $p = .010$) with a reliable model fit (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 22.18$, $df = 7$, $p = .043$) and Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p = .836$).

For the KMT, the style “sociability” showed a significant negative association with “nuclear power” ($OR = .298$, 95 per cent CI [0.08, 0.89], $p = .038$) with a good model fit (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 36.44$, $df = 7$, $p < .001$) and Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p = .998$).

In the TPP’s Facebook posts, the populist content “popular sovereignty” significantly and positively co-occurred with “labour reform” ($OR = 13.5$, 95 per cent CI [2.52, 230.84], $p = .017$) with a good model fit (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 32.21$, $df = 7$, $p < .001$) and Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p = .500$).

For the TSP, the content “exclusion of others” ($OR = 2.155$, 95 per cent CI [1.14, 4.23], $p = .020$) and the style “negativity” ($OR = 3.791$, 95 per cent CI [2.13, 6.82], $p < .001$) showed significant positive associations with “anti-infiltration” with an acceptable model fit (Omnibus $\chi^2 = 119.36$, $df = 7$, $p = .004$) and Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p = .344$).

This suggested that the green coalition’s parties (DPP and TSP) were more inclined to focus on debates over Taiwan’s sovereignty issues (“one country, two systems” and “anti-infiltration”), while the KMT and TPP (藍白, *lanbai*) were more leaning towards livelihood issues (“nuclear power” and “labour reform”). Meanwhile, the green coalition’s applications of populist content and style for sovereignty issues were rather negative, which encompassed “exclusion of others” and “negativity.” Conversely, the KMT and TPP’s applications of populist content (“popular sovereignty”) and avoiding style (“sociability”) over livelihood issues were relatively moderate.

Discussion and Conclusion

By analysing Facebook posts from Taiwanese political actors during the 2020 election, this paper solved four RQs anchored in the literature.

Concerning the presence of populist content and style, this research makes four contributions. It establishes a Taiwan-specific analytical framework, identifies a surge in populist messaging, reveals a predominance of style over content, and highlights the confrontational strategies adopted by minor parties.

First, I verified a robust analytical framework for populist communication in Taiwan’s context with a good-fit model and reliable factor loadings. This framework consists of populist content (“popular sovereignty,” “people-centrism,” “anti-elitism,” “exclusion of others”) and style (“negativity,” “emotionality,” “sociability”). This robust framework confirms that scholars should examine populist content and style separately, even though they are intertwined (Ernst et al., 2019).

Second, I found that populist messages occupied almost half of the Facebook posts by presidential candidates and party leaders during the 2020 election. Despite differences in the codebook from other literature studies, the absolute value of the populist proportion in Taiwan is significantly larger than that in Europe and America. For example, Ernst et al. (2019) found that only 13.6 per cent of social media statements by European and American politicians contained at least one populist key message.

Contextually, two key factors explain Taiwan's distinct populism. First, citizens' spontaneous resistance to (KMT) "elites" contributed to the populist surge. Significant populist attitudes are prevalent among Taiwanese citizens, with Tsai and Pan (2021) reporting that 53.9 per cent exhibited moderate populism and 12.6 per cent a high level. This populist tendency among citizens has evolved beyond attitudes and rhetoric into social movements that have directly impacted Taiwan's political landscape and social structure. Wu and Chu (2021) characterise this as a bottom-up movement originating from civil society against the KMT's authoritarian legacy, indicating an institutionalisation of populist sentiments with historical continuity. This distinct bottom-up model initiated by citizens provides fertile ground for the prevalence in Taiwan.

Second, the consistent presence of populist discourse from political leaders also fuels Taiwan's populism. Unlike Europe and America, where populism is primarily employed by outsiders or challenger parties (Mudde, 2004), populist traits are widespread among Taiwanese politicians and institutions. For instance, some scholars assess Lee Teng-hui as populist due to his anti-expert and anti-intellectual discourses (Krumbein, 2023). Chen Shui-bian is described as populist for mobilising "the people" against "the excluded others" concerning the authoritarian legacy and "the elite" from mainland China (Klein et al., 2025). Former Taipei mayor and TPP leader Ko Wen-je is classified as populist because of his antagonistic views contrasting the "pure people" against "incompetent elites" (Wu and Chu, 2021). Han Kuo-yu, the current president of the Legislative Yuan, is discussed as populist owing to his anti-elitist discourse and self-identification as a common man and political outsider (Krumbein, 2023). This pervasiveness of populism within Taiwan's establishment, coupled with its presence in opposition parties, has deeply entrenched it in Taiwan's political climate. Consequently, the more pronounced manifestation of populism in Taiwan stems from its comprehensive presence across citizens, politicians, governments, and opposition parties.

Third, I found that populist style occurred significantly more and steadier than populist content on Facebook in Taiwan, while the style "sociability" occurred the most and steadily. Theoretically, this characteristic arises because Taiwan's election campaign messages are produced and disseminated on Facebook. Facebook platforms' inherent features, driven by the attention economy and Facebook affordances that compel content producers to maximise user interaction and viewing (Ronzhyn et al., 2023), incentivise content producers to maximise user engagement (Ronzhyn et al., 2023). Consequently, Taiwanese presidential candidates and party leaders were more inclined to adopt more stylistic devices, especially "sociability," in their Facebook posts.

Fourth, at the party level, I found that the DPP, KMT, PFP, and TPP prioritised "people-centrism," while the NPP, TSP, and NP emphasised "anti-elitism" and "exclusion of others" coupled with "negativity." Conceptually, this contrast suggests that the former group employed a relatively moderate populist approach, while the latter exhibited more aggressive and negative strategies. These minor parties strategically adopted a challenger party's populist narrative for self-promotion. Specifically, they consistently employed anti-elitist rhetoric, criticising the ruling authorities' socio-economic incompetence, legal corruption, diplomatic failures, administrative inefficiency, cultural

ignorance, and perceived lack of popular legitimacy (Krumbein, 2023). This framing positioned them as an “opportunity for real change,” similar to UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the UK (March, 2017).

Concerning the relationship between populist content and style, I found a moderate overall correlation. Among them, “negativity” was linked closely with “anti-elitism/exclusion,” while “emotionality” correlated with all content types; in contrast, “sociability” showed only weak correlations. These party-level results verify the stability of “negativity” and “emotionality” in Taiwan’s populist communication while highlighting the limited applicability of “sociability.”

Theoretically, the correlation of “negativity” with “anti-elitism/exclusion of others” is due to “people’s interests” being described as being or about to be undermined and snatched away by “the elites” and “the excluded others” (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). Thus, the “culprits” for the attribution of responsibility are correspondingly evaluated negatively.

“Emotionality” plays a crucial role in the dissemination of populist content. The populist appeal to and praise of “the people,” coupled with the rejection of out-groups, echoes Bakhtin’s “carnival theory” as a form of bottom-up self-liberation (MacMillan, 2017). This carnival spirit, being “people”-based, ritualistic, and subversive (MacMillan, 2017), translates to social media where populist content spreads alongside overt emotional expressions. This allows marginalised popular sovereignty and identity to regain prominence, challenging the power of groups perceived to have disempowered “the people” (MacMillan, 2017). In Taiwan, such emotionality takes various forms, ranging from the DPP’s celebration of democratic rights reclaimed from the authoritarian KMT to local factions’ anger at mainlander elitism and the KMT’s anxiety over the fragmentation of social identity (Cheng, 2025).

The correlation of “sociability” with populist content elements on Facebook in Taiwan is not as strong as European populism-related literature claims (Bracciale and Martella, 2017; Engesser et al., 2017). Given the most presence of “sociability” on Facebook, theoretically, this suggests that despite the expectation of interdependence with populist content, its utilisation and manifestation in practice appear largely independent in Taiwan’s context. In other words, the use of “sociability” is more a result of social media affordances than required for the dissemination of populist content in Taiwan.

Concerning the association between populist content/style and campaign topics, this study offers two contributions. It demonstrates that populist content and style significantly co-occur with the presence of election topics on Facebook. Also, it identifies that political parties showed different tendencies in using populist content and style on election topics.

Overall, I found that populist content and style have significant and different positive associations with the presence of topics “anti-infiltration act,” “trade war,” “fake information,” “HK protests,” “nuclear power,” “one country two systems,” “labour reform,” and “pension reform” on Facebook. Methodologically, this result supports the rationality of separating populist content and style to examine populist communication because of each independent contribution to the outcome (Cassell, 2023; De Vreese et al., 2018).

At the party level, I first found that the DPP frequently paired populist content with the election topic “one country, two systems.” The DPP showed a rather strong association with “exclusion of others” when discussing this topic. Strategically, this involved linking the 2019 HK protest with the “illusion of national subjugation” (also known as 亡國感, *wangguo gan*) to counter Beijing’s emphasis on “one country, two systems” in its 2019 *Message to Compatriots in Taiwan* (Ponce and Wang, 2021).

Second, I found that the green coalition’s TSP and DPP were collectively associated with the topic “anti-infiltration act.” The TSP showed significant co-occurrence with “exclusion of others” and “negativity” in this topic, meanwhile the DPP showed stronger “exclusion of others” to engage in this topic. Theoretically, this aligns with their narrative concerning potential Beijing infiltration and an alleged “fifth column” in Taiwan. The green coalition targeted “fifth column” to the KMT-led blue coalition and Taiwanese businessmen who invested in mainland China as the Communist Party of China’s fellow travellers (中共同路人, *zhonggong tonglu ren*) or clientelism (Wu and Chu, 2021). Hence, the green coalition’s applications of “exclusion of others” and “negativity” in the topic “anti-infiltration” not only responded to the DPP’s crisis rhetoric concerning HK protests during the election (Ponce and Wang, 2021) but also maintained consistency with the TSP’s anti-China position.

Third, I found that the KMT avoided using the style “sociability” to engage in the topic “nuclear power.” Contextually, the “nuclear power” primarily refers to the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant (核四, *hesi*) in Taiwan. To counter the DPP and social organisations’ opposition to nuclear power in Taiwan due to security risks, especially after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident (Tian and Lin, 2023), the KMT appealed to restart nuclear power shut down by the DPP government. On the one hand, nuclear power and the KMT have always been bound together in historical policy decisions. The previous authoritarian KMT government exclusively engaged in agenda-setting, policy formulation, and decision-making regarding Taiwan’s nuclear power, aiming to solve the energy crisis and power shortage in Taiwan (Tian and Lin, 2023). This was supported by pro-nuclear citizens and social organisations after the 15th August Power Outage Incident (八一五全臺大停電, *bayiwu quantai da tingdian*) in 2017 and the subsequent Nuclear Energy Referendum in 2018, which successfully abolished the deadline for the DPP-led “non-nuclear homeland” (無核家園, *wuhe jiayuan*) at an institutional level (Tian and Lin, 2023). Therefore, strategically, given the high controversy of the public’s attitudes towards nuclear power, these contextual factors suggest that the KMT was more inclined to express its view on nuclear power more rationally without “sociability.”

Fourth, I found that the TPP strongly linked “popular sovereignty” to the topic “labour reform.” Taiwan’s labour reform is largely politicised by partisan rivalry between the DPP and KMT and divergence between central and local governments (Lee, 2009). Despite the establishment of the Taiwan Confederation of Trade Unions (TCTU) and official recognition on 1st May 2000, the TCTU has not been particularly successful due to a lack of experience concerning labourers’ wage increases (Lee, 2009). Theoretically, the DPP and KMT have politicised labour reform in Taiwan without fundamentally resolving labour issues. In this context, the TPP utilised “popular sovereignty” to engage with the

topic “labour reform” for two purposes. On the one hand, it sought to emphasise its solid defence of labour rights and interests. On the other hand, it aimed to criticise the Tsai Ing-wen DPP government’s disregard of labour issues, thus distinguishing itself from the two major parties during the election campaign.

Differing from Krumbein’s (2023) qualitative content analysis of whether and how Han Kuo-yu is described as a populist, this paper further uses quantitative content analysis to broaden and explain how more political parties and actors utilised populist content and style during the 2020 election. Also, Chen et al. (2022) apply an agenda-setting framework to explore presidential candidates’ issues strategies concerning the top ten key topics during the 2020 election. Based on this, I further broaden and investigate whether or not and to what extent more candidates and party leaders’ populist content and style were associated with these key topics during the election. Therefore, this paper further links the above literature to the quantitative perspective of populism studies, broadening the current knowledge of Taiwan’s populism and election studies.

While this paper comprehensively explored populist communication by political parties during Taiwan’s 2020 election, a limitation is the relatively small sample sizes of Facebook posts for the NP ($N=57$) and the NPP ($N=95$). Although these samples covered their primary Facebook communication during the campaign and offered valuable descriptive insights into their distinct patterns, the external validity of findings for these minor parties should be interpreted cautiously. Future research could enhance external validity by incorporating more diverse data sources (e.g. other social media platforms, news reports) to deepen the understanding of these minor parties’ populist communication.

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ORCID iD

Hongqin Cheng  <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0755-2153>

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Author Biography

Hongqin Cheng holds a PhD in political communication from the University of Sheffield. His research interests are populist communication, Taiwan studies, and party politics.