Comparative Politics Newsletter

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Populism and Authoritarian Survival in China: Concept and Measurement

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"Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people." In 1863, Abraham Lincoln gave this famous quote in his Gettysburg Address. Eighty years later, Mao Tse-Tung developed the leadership method for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) known as the 'Mass Line' ('群众路线'). The leadership should be "for the masses, relying on the masses, from the masses, and to the masses," and the party should serve "the people whole-heartedly and never for a moment divorce ourselves from the masses."[1] The 'Mass Line' has remained central to the Chinese Communist Party, and Chinese politics more generally, ever since.

Although the 'Mass Line' is very similar to Lincoln's famous quote about democracy, and some scholars view it as outlining a democratic decision-making process in which decisions result from deliberation between the leaders and the citizens (see Blecher, 1979), this style of leadership departs in significant ways from what we would consider pluralistic liberal democracy. Instead, the 'Mass Line' is much closer to what scholars have labeled populism: "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2004, 543).

Like populism, the 'Mass Line' separates society into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: the people/masses and the people's enemy. The 'Mass Line' asks all levels of CCP members to serve the people and represent the people. Over the years, the enemy has changed from the corrupted Kuomingtang (KMT) government to capitalist roaders,[2] to the corrupted factions within the party itself. In many cases, the enemy is an element within the established elite. The enemy, though, can also be any group that threatens the rule of the CCP government and the stability of society. Although the precise identities of the enemy and the people have changed over time, the idea of an antagonistic relationship between corrupted elements of the elite and the people has always remained a central feature of Chinese politics.

Although populism has been examined in some competitive authoritarian regimes, especially in Latin America, it is has been relatively understudied in other forms of authoritarian regimes and regions. Many scholars, particularly in Latin America, have conceptualized populism as a political strategy used by personalistic leaders to mobilize excluded elements of the population to help them gain power (see Weyland, 2001; Levitsky and Loxton, 2013). They have also discussed

[1] The leadership method of the 'Mass Line' is addressed in many of Mao Tse-Tung's essays. His earliest systematic discussion of the 'Mass Line' is in his 1943 article, "Some Question concerning Methods of Leadership" (Mao, [1943] 1967*c*). He later discussed the 'Mass Line' in more detail in his 1945 article, "On Coalition Government" (Mao, [1945] 1967*b*).

[2] The concept of 'capitalist roaders' comes from the Chinese word, '走资派,' and captures a corrupt Chinese official who has taken the capitalist 'road.'

the consequences of populism for various aspects of democracy (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014, 2012). In addition, scholars have distinguished between different sub-types of populism, particularly when comparing the more inclusive populism in Latin America with the more exclusive populism seen in Europe (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). After pointing out the relative lack of attention to populism in Asia, Case (2016) and Subramanian (2016) in this issue of the Comparative Politics Newsletter go on to examine how populism has been employed as a political strategy in Southeast Asia and India. There is almost no work in political science on populism in China. This is surprising because populism has long been used as a strategy to secure power in China. Mao, for example, attributes the success of the CCP against the KMT in the 1940s to the 'Mass Line'. The later leadership of the CCP also treats the 'Mass Line' as an important 'lifeline' of the Communist party (Xinhua, 2013*a*).

> Mao Tse-Tung developed the leadership method for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) known as the 'Mass Line' ('群众路线') …"for the masses, relying on the masses, from the masses, and to the masses" …Like populism, the 'Mass Line' separates society into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: the people/masses and the people's enemy.

How does the populist 'Mass Line' influence the survival of the CCP? Under what conditions does the CCP adopt populism as a political strategy? In this article, we briefly demonstrate that the CCP has used populism as a tool to solve the two fundamental conflicts that exist in all authoritarian regimes, namely, intra-elite conflict and elite-mass conflict (Svolik, 2012). Historically, few Chinese scholars have examined the role of populism in China. Recently, though, Tang (2016) has provided an innovative theoretical discussion of populism's role in regime sustainability in China. One issue, though, with studying populism, both as an ideology and as a political strategy, in an authoritarian regime has to do with how populism is measured. One of the goals of our contribution is to examine the feasibility of measuring populism in China using automated content analysis of public speeches from party leaders and state-controlled news reports. Our preliminary analysis suggests that this is, indeed, feasible, and we are able to produce a measure of populism that varies across time and leaders in ways that are consistent with historical events and commonsense understandings of Chinese politics.

I. Populism as a Strategy of Survival in China

Authoritarian leaders face two fundamental challenges to their rule: challenges from within the elite and challenges from the masses (Magaloni, 2006; Svolik, 2012). No dictators govern alone. Although authoritarian leaders do not need to win elections to stay in power, they do need some cooperation from the masses to generate rents and to avoid costly repression. The very agents, such as the military and high ranking civil leaders, that help keep the dictator in power, though, also pose a threat to the dictator. Below, we briefly describe how Chinese leaders have historically used populism to resolve both of these challenges.

Populism and Intra-elite Conflict

Historically, populism has been used to mobilize previously excluded groups, the masses, to attack sections of the established elite, either within the Chinese Communist party or outside of it. Before taking control of China, for example, the CCP used populism as a tactic to mobilize excluded groups, especially peasants, in its fight against the Kuomingtang Party (KMT). Although the CCP won military battles against the KMT, many scholars argue that the CCP's ultimate victory was primarily political rather than military; that is, that its success was based largely on mass mobilization through propaganda and land reform (Johnson, 1962; Hinton, 1966; Pepper, 1999). According to the CCP's rhetoric, Kuomintang Party rule was "anti-popular," the "disrupter of China's national unity," and the "breeder of civil war" (Mao, [1945] 1967*b*). The Chinese people naturally "demand the immediate abolition" of the KMT one-party dictatorship (Mao, [1945] 1967*b*). Whereas the KMT government was portrayed as anti-popular, Mao attributed the power of the People's Liberation Army to its roots in the masses. According to Mao, the sole purpose of the People's Liberation Army was to stand firmly with the Chinese people and to serve them whole-heartedly. Facing a broken economy and a population already tired of war, the CCP used land reform to mobilize vast numbers of peasants in its battle against

the KMT. They "launch[ed] large-scale rent reduction campaigns and carr[ied] out rent reduction universally in all the Liberated Areas, and particularly in the vast newly liberated areas, so as to arouse the revolutionary fervour of the great majority of the peasant masses" (Mao, [1945] 1967*b*).

After taking control of China, Mao continued to use populist appeals to the masses to consolidate his personal hold on power, to weaken institutional constraints on that power, and to eliminate his rivals. Party elites who were threats to Mao's personalist rule were portrayed as capitalists roaders and enemies of both the Communist revolution and the Chinese people. Top leaders of the government were criticized for "adopting the reactionary stand of the bourgeoisie" (Mao, 1967*a*). Class struggle was emphasized and revolutionary action was praised. Mao encouraged Red Guards to rebel against "all landlords, bourgeois, imperialists, revisionists, and their running dogs who exploit and oppress the workers, peasants, revolutionary intellectuals and revolutionary parties and groupings" (Mao, 1966*a*). Mao used the mobilization of the masses to both justify his opposition to government policy and as evidence in support of his own policies. For example, he stated that "the broad masses of students and revolutionary teachers support us and resist the policies of the past" (Mao, 1966*b*). Liu Shaoqi, the head of the government before the Cultural Revolution, was soon replaced and arrested for being the "biggest capitalist roader in the party" and was beaten regularly at public denunciation meetings. By mobilizing the masses, Mao was able to destroy virtually all of the state and party institutions, and concentrate power in his own hands.

In many ways, Mao's use of populism to mobilize the masses in an attempt to consolidate his personal power mirrors the strategy adopted by many populist leaders in Latin America. Like Mao, these populist leaders in Latin America called for "government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers" (Weyland, 2001). Morales in Bolivia and Chávez in Venezuela both encouraged the previously voiceless masses to participate in politics. Relying on 'the people', Morales and Chávez sought to build a form of 'direct democracy' that ultimately undermined representative democratic institutions and concentrated power in their own hands. As Morales pointed out, mobilizing the people to protest and blockade is important, because it is this mass mobilization that allows one to change and enforce laws (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

The use of populism as a strategic tactic can create a security dilemma, though. The mobilized masses that are used to gain power are themselves a threat to the government/leader. In fact, after the Cultural Revolution, we observe much less mass mobilization by the government. Nonetheless, populist rhetoric continued to be used whenever political rivals within the party were eliminated. Rivals of the party leaders are often portrayed as betraying the masses and as a threat to the interest of the people. They are often charged with corruption and removed during special anti-corruption campaigns (Tang, 2016; Jiang and Xu, 2015; Dai, 2016).

Populism and Elite-mass Conflict

In addition to intra-elite threats, authoritarian leaders also face threats from the masses. CCP leaders have been well aware of this threat. Indeed, this is why the 'Mass Line' strategy contains the element, 'to the mass'. After forming some ideas or policies, party members and leaders are supposed to "go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action" (Mao, [1943] 1967*c*). Whereas the previous section focused on constructing the people's enemy, the process of 'to the mass' has to do with constructing the homogeneous interests of 'the people'. In practice, the people may or may not share coherent interests. Similar to what Disch (2011) has in mind when she talks about 'mobilization representation', 'Mass Line' leaders do not aim to make some preexisting interest visible. Instead, 'Mass Line' leadership is about persuasion and about constructing the people's interests and their understanding of these interests. The party is also constructed as the only true and loyal protector and representative of the people's interests.

We argue that the CCP seeks to achieve two goals through this process that help to prevent mass rebellion. First, populist rhetoric and policy are used to show the government's responsiveness to the masses and to coopt potential opponents. During and after the civil war, for example, the CCP attempted to secure support among the peasants for the Party and the new communist regime through rent reduction and land redistribution. Indeed, the fact that the Chinese central government is perceived to be highly responsive to

popular needs suggests that, in many ways, this populist strategy has been successful (Tang, 2016).

Second, a populist strategy has been used to marginalize political opponents from the masses. Societal groups that show dissatisfaction with the authoritarian rule of the government are almost always portrayed as enemies of the 'national interest' and 'the people' in an attempt to undermine any sympathy or support they might receive from the public. In general, stability is portrayed as the most important national interest, because without stability there can be no development. Protesters against the government are often portrayed as threatening societal stability for their own selfish interests; they are portrayed as enemies of the people. This is precisely what happened, for example, when Tibetans attacked the Wabaling Tibetan Muslims in the late 1950s after the CCP took control of Tibet. The Wabaling Tibetan Muslims, who often served as translators for the CCP, were attacked because they were perceived to be collaborating with the CCP. Although the Tibetans did not attack any other Muslim group, the Chinese state-controlled media portrayed the incidents as radical religious attacks that targeted all Muslims and something that therefore threatened the stability and unity of society (Atwill, 2016).

A much more recent example concerns the pro-democracy Hong Kong Umbrella Movement in 2014. After the decision by the National People's Congress to revise Hong Kong's electoral system, thousands of students took to the streets in protest. Rather than report the full range of opinions held by Hong Kong residents towards the protests, China's mainland media concentrated on only the negative opinions. It focused, for instance, on complaints from residents about how the protests blocked roads, created stress and inconveniences, hurt the local economy, and in general threatened the interests of the majority of society (Xinhua, 2013*c*,*b*). It is little surprise then that the Hong Kong student protests received almost no sympathy and support from Chinese citizens on the mainland (New York Times, 2014).

II. Measuring Populism in China

When do authoritarian leaders adopt a populist political strategy? Under what conditions is a populist strategy effective at promoting authoritarian survival? To answer research questions such as these, we need to be able to measure populism. Scholars have measured populism in Europe, Latin America, and the U.S. using both human-coded and automated content analysis. For example, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) use human-coded content analysis of political party broadcasts to examine the use of populist discourse by six Belgian parties. Hawkins (2009) also uses human-coded content analysis to measure the degree of populist language in the speeches of political chief executives from thirty-four Latin American and other countries. Dictionary-based automated text analysis has recently been used to measure populism in Western Europe (Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011) and the United States (Bonikowski and Gidron, 2016). Although automated text analysis usually has lower content validity than human-coded content analysis, it is often more reliable, less time and resource intensive, and can produce high levels of validity when applied carefully (Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011; Grimmer and Stewart, 2013; Laver and Garry, 2000). In what follows, we provide the first measure of populism in China over time using a dictionary-based automated text analysis.

We apply our dictionary-based automated text analysis to two different types of texts in China: news reports from the state-controlled media and the governments' annual work reports. The first type of text comprises the daily news reports from China Central Television's (CCTV) Xinwen Lianbo (Daily News Program) from 2003 to 2015. CCTV is the predominant state television broadcaster, and the main propaganda machine of the Chinese government. The Xinwen Lianbo program broadcasts news every day from 7 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. All of the local TV stations are required to broadcast Xinwen Lianbo on at least one of their local channels during that time period. In fact, for many years, Xinwen Lianbo was the only TV program Chinese audiences could watch at this time in the evening. To a large extent, our decision to examine populist discourse in China's state-controlled media follows the same basic approach adopted by Rooduijn (2014), who examines opinion articles in West European newspapers to measure the diffusion of populism in public debates. In the context of authoritarian regimes, state-controlled media acts as a propaganda machine and the mouthpiece of the government. As a result, news reports from state-controlled media such as CCTV should provide a fairly accurate reflection of the type of discourse used by the government.

Table 1: Dictionary of the Content Analysis

Anti-Elitism	People-Centrism
class (阶级)	proletariat (无产阶级)
corrupt (腐败，腐化，堕落，贪污，私利)	people (人民，老百姓)
betray (背叛，背弃，背离)	mass (群众)
anti-revolution/(反革命)	revolution (革命)
shame (耻辱，羞耻)	worker (工人)
struggle (斗争)	camp (阵营)
	peasant (农民)

The second type of text comprises the annual work reports published by the Chinese central government. Around the beginning of each year, the Prime Minister delivers an annual report to the National People's Congress. The work report usually contains three main parts: an overview of the government's performance (achievement) during the past year, the government's policy and plan for the current/coming year, and the government's plan to build a better government. In many ways, annual work reports are similar to election manifestos.

Each of the two different types of text has its strengths and weaknesses. Compared to annual work reports, the subject matter of CCTV news reports is more heterogeneous and may include topics that are not always relevant for evaluating the use of populism as a political strategy. That said, CCTV news reports provide a much richer body of information. Significantly, CCTV news reports can be aggregated into different units, such as days, weeks, or months. This is useful if one wishes to examine whether and how the use of populism responds to economic and political shocks. Another advantage with respect to external validity is that news reports are potentially comparable across countries. On the other hand, government work reports provide a more direct and 'unmediated' look at the political strategy of the CCP. They also allow us to investigate the use of populism over a much longer period of time. For example, we can look at government work reports from 1954 to 1964 and from 1975 to 2015,[3] whereas we have data on CCTV news reports only from 2003 to 2015. In some ways, using two different types of text acts as a validity check; the two measures should be highly correlated in the period in which they overlap.

For the annual government work reports, each report is treated as one document. For the preliminary analyses reported in this paper, each year's news from Xinwen Lianbo are grouped as one document. The automated content analysis assumes that each document is a 'bag of words', in which the order of words does not matter. Although we only look at the frequency of words and ignore the real-world generating process of the texts, a document that is produced to convey populist ideas should generally contain more populist words than other documents. This method has been shown to generate similar results to those generated by human-coded methods (Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011; Grimmer and Stewart, 2013).

To build our dictionary, we draw on existing theoretical and empirical work related to the measurement of populism. People-centrism and anti-elitism are recognized as the two key components of populism, irrespective of whether populism is measured by human coders or a computer. Existing research has identified words that reflect people-centrism and anti-elitism (Bonikowski and Gidron, 2016; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). As this research focuses primarily on Europe and Latin America, though, we cannot simply construct our dictionary by translating this set of words into Chinese.

We first translate existing dictionaries of populism into Chinese (Bonikowski and Gidron, 2016; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). For each word, we try to identify all possible Chinese translations that express a similar meaning. We then examine whether both CCTV news and the government's annual work reports use these translated Chinese words. Only words used in both types of text are included in our dictionary. We also randomly select and read texts that contain these populist words to see if the use of these

[3] With the exception of 1975, the People's Congress did not meet during the Cultural Revolution.

words truly reflects populism in the China context. For example, the word 'elite' (精英) does not reflect anti-elitism in either type of text, and is thus not included in our dictionary. We also identify and add China context specific words that reflect anti-elitism and people-centrism by reading random subsets of the texts. For example, the word 'class' (阶级) in the China context is often used to separate society into the corrupted bourgeoisie and the pure proletariat. The word 'class' (阶级) reflects both people-centrism and anti-elitism, and is therefore included in our dictionary. The list of words in our dictionary is shown in Table 1.

The degree of populism is measured by the percentage of populist words used in each document. Unlike English, Chinese is written without spaces between words, and one word usually consists of multiple characters. We use the Stanford Word Segmenter developed by the Stanford NLP group to split the texts into a sequence of words, i.e., to insert space between each Chinese word. In Chinese, characters such as "的", "地", and "得" are usually attached to a noun to change the word from a noun to an adjective, verb, or adverb. During the segmentation process, the root/noun is generally separated from the characters "的", "地", and "得", a process we can treat as word stemming as well. Therefore, although the dictionary only includes the nouns shown in Table 1, our word frequencies actually include all forms of the words. After segmentation, we use the R package Quanteda developed by Benoit and Nulty (2016) to automatically identify populist words and calculate the percentage of populist words in a document.

In Figure 1, we show how the degree of populism in the government's annual work reports changes over time. Each color represents a different prime minister (speaker). Although the prime minister is supposed to give the reports, the deputy prime minister actually gives the reports in some years. We use lighter colors to highlight these particular years, but still label them as belonging to the PM's government. It turns out that the reports given by the deputy PM are much less populist than the reports given by the PM in the same government. This might be because the deputy PM does not feel the same ability to 'represent' the people and the government as the prime minister. The annual reports given just before the Cultural Revolution (1964) and at the end of the Cultural Revolution (1975) are, by far, the most populist. The degree of populism is generally lower after Deng Xiaoping's reforms in 1979, but there is still variation across time.

The different color groups in Figure 1 are based on who gave the annual work report speech. One issue that arises here concerns 'succession years' in which the leadership of the CCP changes hands. In succession years, such as 2003 and 2013, the incumbent head of government gives the report to the People's Congress. However, the succession process happens during the meeting of the People's Congress, and so it is hard to say whether the reports reflect the policy of the incumbent government or the new government. Things are made more complicated by the fact that the annual work reports are drafted by groups of people in the government and usually collectively approved before the meeting. When it comes to analyzing the CCTV news reports, I treat data for 2003 and 2013 as reflecting the degree of populism in the new government's policy. This is because the succession process happened early (March) in these years, and so the majority of the news coverage in these years should be influenced by the new government leadership.

In Figure 2, we show the degree of populism measured in CCTV news reports. The light blue dots represent the first tenure of the Hu Jingtao and Wen Jiabao leadership. The green dots represent the second tenure of the Hu and Wen leadership. And the brown dots represent the Xi Jinpin and Li Keqiang leadership. As we can see, populism peaked in 2008, after which it declined, before a small rise in the first two years (2013 and 2014) of Xi Jinpin's tenure. In Figure 3, we plot our two measures of populism based on the different types of text side by side. The percentage of populist words is not directly comparable across the two types of text, because the document lengths and styles are quite different and because the CCTV news reports contain significantly more non-populist content. What matters in Figure 3 is the extent to which the trends in the use of populism are similar. Although our analyses are very preliminary at this stage, the trends over time in our two measures of populism are fairly similar, suggesting a certain degree of concurrent validity.

Our project is in its very early stages. So far, we have begun to evaluate the potential of using state-controlled news reports and public speeches to measure populism in a closed authoritarian regime (China) with automated text analysis. This is our first attempt to measure populism in China. As a result, there is much more work

Figure 1: Degree of Populism in the Annual Work Reports of the Chinese Government

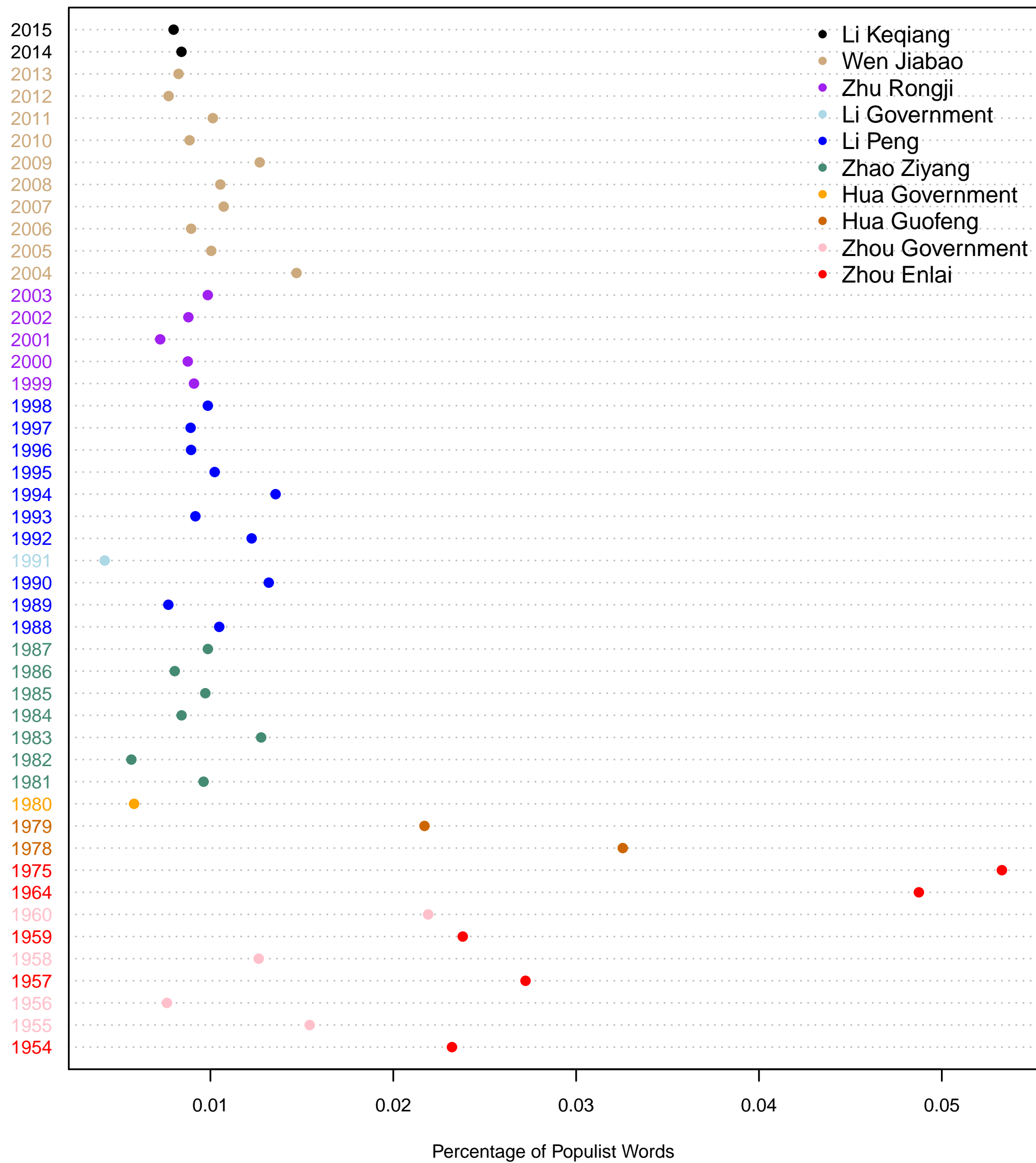


Figure 2: Degree of Populism in CCTV News Reports

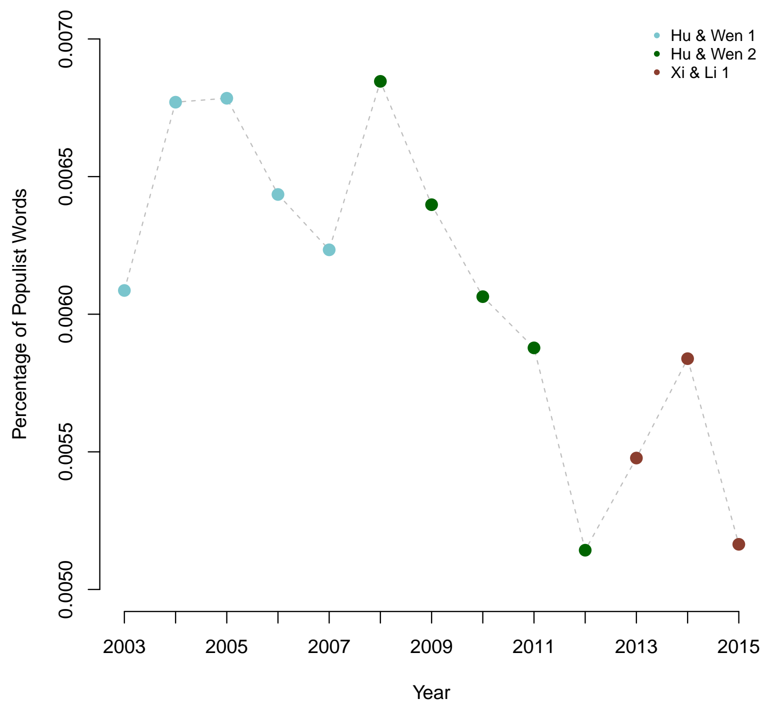
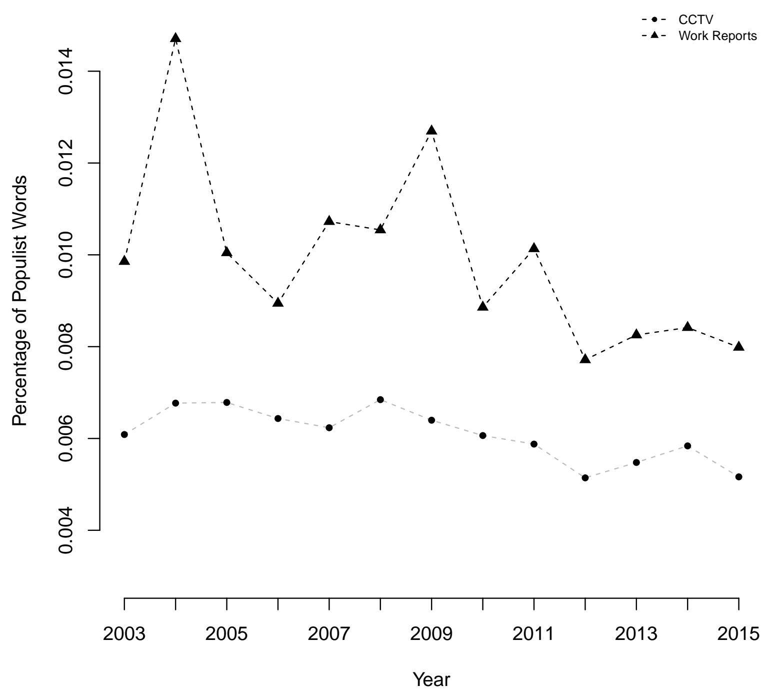


Figure 3: Degree of Populism in the Annual Work Reports of the Chinese Government and CCTV News Reports



that needs to be done to improve and evaluate the validity of our measure. One possible extension is to use an expert survey to help evaluate and build our populism dictionary. Our analyses so far suggest that the degree of populism in China varies both across time and leaders. In the future, we plan to examine whether our measure of populism varies in theoretically intuitive ways. Does the strategic use of populism, for example, demobilize opponents and contribute to the stability of authoritarian regimes?

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What Went Wrong? Leftwing Populist Democratic Promises and Autocratic Practices

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Hugo Chávez inaugurated a wave of leftwing populism in Latin America that also brought Evo Morales and Rafael Correa to the presidencies of Bolivia and Ecuador. These leaders promised to reform all national institutions, rejected neoliberalism, promoted Latin American integration and unity, and aimed to establish participatory, communal, and direct forms of democracy. They came to power as a result of profound crises of political representation and popular insurrections against neoliberal policies. They convened participatory constituent assemblies that drafted constitutions with expanded rights. Leftist scholars expected that their regimes would inaugurate a new dawn towards more democratic societies. Yet after their long terms in power, the sobering reality is that their governance eroded democracy. Chávez (and his successor Nicolás Maduro), Morales, and Correa concentrated power in the executive and subordinated all other branches of government, they used the state to colonize the public sphere by regulating the content of what the media could publish, they clashed with social movements and criminalized protest, they regulated NGOs, and they created parallel social movements. While their governments reduced poverty when the prices of oil and minerals reached record levels, they also increased dependency on natural resource extraction.

In order to explain what went wrong, scholars and activists developed structuralist arguments that focused on the dependence on natural resource extraction, institutional explanations of why populism in contexts of weak institutions led to competitive authoritarianism, and arguments that focused on how the political logic of populism led to the erosion of democracy.

I. Dependency on Natural Resource Extraction

Chávez, Morales, and Correa were elected on platforms to reverse neoliberal policies, and to reduce inequality by increasing social spending. They promised to move away from natural resource extraction. Morales and Correa even claimed that they were implementing sustainable models of development based on the Andean notions of suma qamaña and sumak kawsay to achieve "the good life."

Writing at the peak of Chávez's ascent, Weyland (2009, 146) wrote that "rather than tracing a new development model ('twenty-first century socialism'), the populist left led by Chávez is largely reviving the traditional rentier model." Oil and mineral rents allowed these governments to reject neoliberal orthodoxy, increase state spending, and create regional organizations free from U.S. hegemony, like the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA). Despite their rhetoric of changing the economic matrix of natural resource exploitation and oil and mineral rents, these governments increased state spending without reducing their economic dependence on minerals. "Between 1998 and the present, the percentage of Venezuela's export earnings derived from oil increased from 68.7% to 96%" (Hetland, 2016, 9). In Bolivia, the exports of extractives rose from 41.8% in 2001 to 74% in 2009 (Schilling-Vacaflor and Vollrath, 2012, 128). In Ecuador, oil exports increased from 41% in 2002 to 58 percent in 2011, and by 2007 Correa had granted "2,8 million hectares to mining companies, half of which were for the extraction of metals" (Martínez Novo, 2014, 118).

Oil and mineral rents were used to strengthen the role of the state in the economy and society, and funded social programs and anti-poverty initiatives. World Bank figures indicated that in Venezuela the poverty rate fell from 55.4% of the population in 2002 to 28.5% in 2009. Poverty in Ecuador was reduced from 37.4% in 2006 to 29.4% in 2011. In Bolivia, it dropped from 60.4% in 2006 to 50.6% in 2009, with an even greater decrease in levels of extreme poverty (de la Torre and Arnson, 2013, 28). Yet prosperity lasted as long as the bonanza, and as Weyland anticipated, the rentier model proved to be unsustainable in the long run. Accord-