

How do Populist Parties Die?

March 28th, 2022

Abstract: Populist parties die in two ways: 1) the party abandons its populist principles for building a larger coalition, and the populist aspect of the party ends in *programmatic failure*, or 2) the party sustains its populist principles but suffers from *electoral failure* as it fails to build a sufficiently large coalition. This thesis contributes to the populism literature by providing a new theoretical framework to understand the demise of populist parties. Populist leaders from movement-born parties are assumed to be policy-seeking instead of vote-seeking politicians. Hence, their perception of the trade-off between policy- and vote-seeking electoral strategies would change when “the people” they represent, defined by populists, have a majority or minority status among all electorates. When “the people” have a majority status and the party is in a time of crisis, that is, when the party is failing to build a winning majority, populist leaders are more prone to changing the platform because the perceived trade-off is small. Here, parties with a stronger populist leadership can change more rapidly and successfully than those with a weaker populist leadership with less governing autonomy because of the constraints imposed by other powerful intra-party coalitions. However, when “the people” have minority status, the effect of a strong populist leadership reverses as the perceived policy-vote trade-off is large. Hence, in a time of crisis, parties with strong populist leadership would confront more delays to change their platform than those with a weaker populist leadership that is more balanced and constrained by other vote-seeking party officials. In this paper, I adopt a most-similar design to investigate three cases (four observations) of populist parties, including the United Farmer of Alberta (UFA) and Social Credit, which are Canadian parties, and the People's Party in the United States.



A Senior Honors Thesis Submitted to the Department of Political Science
University of California, San Diego

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement	2
List of Tables and Figures	4
Chapter 1: How do Populist Parties Die?	5
1.1 INTRODUCTION	5
1.1.1 Research Motivation	8
1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW	10
1.2.1 Defining Populism	10
1.2.2 Changes in Party Platform	13
1.2.3 Normative Debates on Populism	15
1.3 RESEARCH DESIGN	17
1.3.1 Data	20
Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundations	23
2.1 DEPENDENT VARIABLE	23
2.2 EXPLANATORY VARIABLES	26
2.2.1 Macro Results	34
2.3 SCOPE AND EXTERNAL VALIDITY	39
Chapter 3: United Farmer of Alberta	44
3.1 THE 1935 DEBACLE	44
3.2 A SOCIALIST AGENDA VS. MONETARY CONSERVATISM	49
Chapter 4: Social Credit Party	56
4.1 PROGRAMMATIC FAILURE IN 1944	56
4.2 AN EMPTY PROMISE	60
4.3 CROSS-CASE COMPARISON	64
Chapter 5: People's Party	66
5.1 FUSIONISTS VS. ANTIFUSIONISTS	66
Chapter 6: Conclusion	74

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1: Categorization of the Outcome	24
Table 2: Occupational Distribution of the Labor Force in Alberta, 1911 - 1951	28
Table 3: Labor Force Status of the Population (in thousands), 1870-1910	29
Table 4: List of Populist Leaders and Their Opposition	31
Table 5: Theoretical Framework	34
Table 6: Summary of Macro Results	38
Table 7: Electoral Rules used in Alberta, from 1905 to Present	42
Table 8: Internal Division with the UFA	54
Table 9: Comparison Between the Social Credit and UFA	65
Table 10: Average Market Prices of Crops, 1870-1897	67
Figure 1: Average Farm Product Price per Bushel, from 1919 - 1937 in Alberta, Canada	55
Figure 2: Average Farm Product Price per Bushel, from 1933 - 1947 in Alberta, Canada	63

Chapter 1: How do Populist Parties Die?

1.1 INTRODUCTION

How do populist parties die? Along with the incident of the American Tea Party movement of 2009, the rise of populist parties campaigning on anti-trade and anti-immigration platforms in the West has renewed research interests in the origin of the populist movements and the effects of the globalization backlash. However, as echoed by many, less is known about how populist parties will come to an end (Noury and Roland, 2021). How do they behave once they are in office? Even though we are currently incapable of answering these questions by observing the in-power populist parties in Austria, Italy, Hungary, etc., populist parties are not rare in history. From the massive democratic movement led by the US People's Party to the multiple occurrences on the Canadian prairie in the 1930s, ample evidence exists to explore the end of populism. Once in office, some parties gradually drop the populist strategies that make them win the elections and tone down its use of populist rhetoric, that is, the strong emphasis on the inimical relationship between "the people" and "the elites." By contrast, others choose to insist on pursuing a populist strategy, which often leads to electoral debacles. Existing comparative works examining individual populist parties have provided in-depth historical documentation of populist movements, with some providing narratives on the series of events leading up to the decline of each party. I do not intend to adjudicate these complex historiographical debates within each case. The research motivation originates from the absence of an overarching theory explaining how populist parties end. I take advantage of the substantial literature of the US and Canadian populist movements. By collectively examining and weighing existing explanations on

each movement, this thesis proposes a theoretical framework for characterizing the demise of populist parties.

Populist parties can end in two ways: 1) the party abandons its populist principles to appeal broadly for building a larger coalition; it ceases being populist and suffers from *programmatic failures*, or 2) the party sustains its populist principles but fails to build a sufficiently large coalition to win future elections. By populist, I mean that political parties 1) construct two antagonistic groups of "the pure people" against "the corrupt elite" through the use of rhetoric, and 2) argue politics should be an *ultimate* expression of the general will of the people and in particular, demonstrate reluctance to *negotiate narrow policy* concessions as they *often* promise voters with a wholesale reform to save them from exploitation (Mudde, 2004; Aslanidis, 2017). Hence, I use changes in rhetoric and policy to assess whether populist parties abandon or maintain the populist elements with their electoral platform.

My central thesis is that, during a time of crisis, the majority (minority) status of "the people," defined by populist leaders, within electoral districts and the strength of populist leadership will determine the ability of a populist party to change its electoral platform. The majority status of "the people," who are mostly farmers in all four observations, suggests farmers compose more than 50% of the labor force. A strong populist leadership indicates the populist leader could largely influence the making of a new party platform according to his ideological preferences. Populist leaders are assumed to be policy-seeking instead of vote-seeking. When farmers have minority status, parties with strong leadership would have trouble broadening their party platform because populist leaders perceive the trade-off between policy-seeking and vote-seeking strategies as large, and therefore, reluctant to make policy concessions regardless of electoral pressures. However, when farmers have a majority status, populist leaders perceive the

policy-vote trade-off as small and would be more willing to change its party platform given electoral pressures. Here, populist parties would benefit from a strong populist leader as he has more governing autonomy to change the party platform rapidly.

To test these hypotheses, this thesis adopts a most-similar research design to conduct in-depth case studies on three ended populist parties, including the United Farmer of Alberta (UFA) and the Social Credit, which are Canadian agrarian parties, and the People's Party in the United States. I use both cross-case and within-case variations to trace the mechanistic explanations that account for how populist party leaders choose amongst different strategies given their voter base and the need for building a winning coalition during a time of crisis. Chapter 3 presents the macro findings of the case studies.

The rest of the introductory chapter first addresses the thesis's research motivations and its place in the existing literature. Then, I survey the analytical and normative discussions on populism to establish a necessary common ground for general concepts. Scholars have long debated the key characteristics that separate populist movements from other ideologically-oriented movements, and no definition reaches a consensus. The adopted definition includes the most distinct elements of populism, giving it sufficient analytical power to separate the examined cases from others using *policy* and *rhetorical* perspectives. It does not include any movement-specific elements that are often adopted by some literature to maximize the theory's explanatory power. As mentioned above, the normative concerns surrounding populism raise important and unanswered questions regarding democratic institutions. I survey these debates and discuss them along with the 2016 populist backlash in the US. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research design.

1.1.1 Research Motivation

We should pay attention to how populist parties end for two reasons. From an analytical perspective, a general theory explaining the demise of populism is missing in the literature. Recent populist movements against trade and immigration openness renew research on the origin and effect of the globalization backlash. Nevertheless, this literature often wrongly equates the popular backlashes against globalization to populism. Globalization backlash is broadly referred to as the politicization of and the popular lash out on globalization-related issues. Populism, on the other hand, is void of any systematic ideology; it is a distinct use of the “people vs. elite” rhetoric and party strategy (discussed below in the definition section). Indeed, populism and the globalization backlash are not mutually exclusive; the broader societal changes that give rise to voters’ economic and social-cultural grievances are the backbone of populist movements, or campaign slogans claiming the “true people” are underrepresented and opposed by elites. Decomposing the origin or the end of populism, most importantly, is to explain why leaders specifically *adopt or abandon* a populist form of rhetoric and policy within their mobilization platforms. Furthermore, globalization backlash scholars often identify the micro-conditions (supply/demand; material/non-material) that are present during populist electoral successes, yet they wrongly assume these same conditions can always translate into populist outcomes. They overlook the often-problematic issues of political mobilization and party strategies that materialize interests into legislations or formations of new parties. We could not logically deduce how populist movements end by identifying the conditions that are causal or correlational to the origin of populist movements.

Additionally, a rich political science and sociological literature have provided extensive examinations of the three selected cases. Many of them provide detailed documentation on the

political events leading up to the decline of each populist party. The People's Party initiated one of the largest popular movements in the US and gained tremendous traction within American academia. Collectively, Goodwyn (1976), Hicks (1981), and McMath (1993) draw a comprehensive picture of this populism movement from the birth of farmers' interest groups in the 1860s to the total vanishing of agrarian populism in the early 1900s. Pollack (1976) provides a detailed intellectual history of the birth and decline of the midwestern populist traditions and philosophies from the 1870s to the late 90s. Similarly, the two selected cases of Canadian prairie populism are also well-documented and analyzed (Sharp, 1948; Lipset, 1950; Macpherson 1953; Conway, 1968; Sinclair, 1975; Finkel, 1989). These works carefully scrutinize populist manuscripts, legislations, or newspapers published during the campaign and governing periods. Specifically, Macpherson provides a textual analysis of the UFA and Social Credits' underpinning of political theory and populist philosophy, and how these ideas were largely incompatible with the formal party system and gradually vanished in practice (1953, chapters 3 and 6). However, despite many shared similarities in leaders' ideology, movement origin, and party platforms existing among these cases of North American populism, general comparison is missing, especially on the decline of each party. Most explanations on the decline of populism are case-specific and do not provide a broader framework for studying the behaviors of populist parties during times of crisis. By taking advantage of this rich literature, this thesis provides a general theory explaining how populist parties die, especially, on what conditions facilitate or hinder populist parties' abilities and willingness to change their party platforms.

From a normative perspective, the modern populist movements observed in Western Europe and the United States have been accompanied by elements of nationalism, antiscience (antiintellectualism) mobilizations, and racism. Along with the January 6th Congress Riot in

2021, we have witnessed how existing populist movements challenged the institutions of representative democracy and invoked democratic backsliding in the United States. Scholars have raised caution regarding the danger of these phenomena causing more ideological polarization and democratic deconsolidation. However, does populism inherently stand as an antithesis to representative democracy? As one warns against the coercive effect of populism on democratic institutions, we should equally pay attention to how these exact institutions fail to represent the interests of average people, giving rise to the existing populist backlash. How have the previous American administrations from both parties failed to address the interests of the working and lower-middle-class voters who then embraced populism in the 2016 election? Do the existing populist uprisings serve as a similar corrective force to the movements initiated by the People's Party or the Canadian UFA for the existing underrepresented groups in the US? Consider the differences between the progressive movements from the 1890s to the 1920s and the capital riot, then under what conditions will these movements with a populist agenda strengthen representative democracies? To answer these questions, we must look back in history to understand how populist parties progress and end.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.2.1 Defining Populism

Populism obtains the notorious and almost cliché reputation of being hard to define. Most conventional definitions acknowledge that populism must include a normative and antagonistic construct of “the people” versus “the elites”; nevertheless, little consensus exists beyond this characteristic. Populism has the reputation of being "defining the undefinable" because it essentially is a thin ideology with an "empty shell." It lacks key values such as governance

solutions to major socio-political questions, compared to more extensively established political-ideological systems like liberalism or socialism (Taggart, 2000; Mudde, 2004). In addition, the construct of “the people vs. the elite” is inherently normative instead of an empirical difference in behaviors or attitudes (Mudde, 2004). Populism's chameleonic nature makes deriving a universal definition or framework prone to the accusation of being either too narrow or too broad when applying it to other historical cases (Canovan, 1981; Canovan, 2005). Among the narrower definitions, populism is often defined as an ideology or by its origin. Many recognize that for populist parties or movements to thrive as a captivating alternative, the mainstream parties must be in a crisis of performance and legitimacy; they exclude or fail to represent some significant portion of popular opinions (Roberts, 2017). This observation is validated by recent regional studies examining the effect of the globalization backlash on populist electoral performance (Chen, 2020; Barone and Kreuter, 2021; Rodrik, 2021). Moreover, within the seminal volumes that examine North American populist movements, many define populism as an ideology or a set of ideas. In this tradition, some scholars argue that populism is rooted in the inherent critique of capitalism from the political formation of the petite bourgeoisie, influenced by Lenin's examination of the Russian Narodnik; these critiques are normally directed toward industrial monopoly, monetary institutions, corrupt governments, etc. (Conway, 1978, p. 51). However, this approach is too narrow and problematic on two fronts. First, popular resentments against capitalism or a poor party's performance are not unique to populist parties. Instead, populism, a concept or thin-ideology with an “empty shell,” only exists as a specific left- or right-wing appeal *after* populist leaders localize it to the “socio-political context” (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012). Narrowly defining populism within a socio-economic

context at a given time does not provide a useful framework for examining populist movements across cases.

Second, it is unclear who composes the *petite bourgeoisie*, or more broadly “the people,” which has an inherent definitional ambiguity in theory (not in practice). Politicians fill in “the empty shell” and strategically construct “the people” and “the elite” as two distinct emotional frames. In sum, the ideological approach to populism does not provide an analytical distinction of populist movements from other types of movements. Thus, this paper adopts an alternative approach developed in the literature, analyzing populism as a mode of mobilization through distinct discursive styles and political strategies.

By populist, I mean that political parties 1) rhetorically construct two antagonistic groups of “the pure people” against “the corrupt elite,” and 2) argue that politics should be an *ultimate* expression of the general will of the people and in particular, demonstrate reluctance to *negotiate narrow policy* concessions as they sometimes seek a wholesale reform to restore the sovereignty of the people from exploitation (Mudde, 2004; Aslanidis, 2017). Per this definition, populism primarily manifests through the use of “the people vs. the elite” rhetoric and through (party) policy that narrowly represents their people base. Below, I separately address each component.

The discursive approach to populism emphasizes the selective and strategic use of rhetoric, deepening the separations between the inner and outer groups. Populist leaders fill in the empty shells of “the people” and “the elite” by providing substantive meanings to these words and then use this rhetoric to mobilize the often-underrepresented people for political actions. The discursive and ideational approaches are not two mutually exclusive frameworks; Rather, many similarities can be found. Both frameworks recognize the necessary economic and political conditions for populism to emerge, and that for individual-level resentments to be

activated in a populist fashion, political leaders must use linguistic and emotional cues and framing to provide the appropriate context, such as intentional failure of democratic representation or politicians prompting self-fulfilling agendas (Hawkins et al., 2019).

The policy component of populism can be traced back to a unique emphasis on “the people” by populists. Populist leaders, who emphasize that the *ultimate* political legitimacy and virtue reside in “the people,” often demonstrate strong reluctance to negotiate with political outsiders, who they heavily denounce as evil elites, for policy compromises and concessions. Within the party policy dimension, I argue it is also important to examine the organizational component of populism. Due to their emphasis on restoring popular sovereignty, populist leaders tend to advocate for a direct, unmediated, and noninstitutionalized form of governance (Weyland 2001, p. 14). This emphasis translates into party organizations such as direct delegates or plebiscitary democracy that allows the participation of voters in the making of party policies. Direct participation often takes the forms of submitting and debating policy resolutions to the party-run alliance and annual conventions (see each case study chapter for more detailed illustrations). Populist leaders are sometimes described as reluctantly political because they mobilize by condemning how “the elite” or existing institutional establishment are non-responsive and fail to follow the general will (Taggart, 2000). They emphasize how they “reluctantly” take political offices to restore a more just representation of “the people” while drawing differences between them and other political elites holding offices.

1.2.2 Changes in Party Platform

This section surveys the literature both on party change to identify conditions where one would expect active alterations to party platforms (i.e., rhetoric and policy) and on challenges more prone to populist parties. This thesis examines populist parties’ varied success in changing

their platform under the circumstance where they are failing to secure a winning coalition to win the next election. Below, I refer to this circumstance as a time of crisis. Following the coalition management literature, I model a political party as the coalition of popular groups with (intense) preferences on particular political issues managed by politicians (Karol, 2009). The thesis makes the same assumption as Harmel and Janda (1994) that the party only changes under pressures endangering its pursuit of the primary goal, such as performing poorly in achieving its vote- or office-maximizing goals. Two factors can broadly account for variations in party change on political strategies, organizational characteristics, and issue positions. One is internal pressures, such as changes in the conformation and composition of the party's dominant coalition. The second factor is external pressures, which are broadly defined as external stimuli that impact a party's pursuit of electoral success. The model of party change proposed by Harmel and Janda (1994) primarily emphasizes external pressures as the primary factor driving party change. This is mostly true. Despite the decision-making constraints party leaders and the dominant factions place on changing party platforms, it is ultimately the occurrences of external events such as drastic changes in economic conditions or declines in popular support that alter parties' goal pursuing agenda and incentivize party members to change party strategy.

Nevertheless, we should not overlook circumstances such as party internal disputes and/or party leadership changes in *expediting or delaying* changes of the party platform. This thesis takes the time of the electoral crisis as a given and primarily investigates how internal party dynamics facilitate or hinder the making of a new party platform. One main conclusion of Karol (2009) is that a party's relative shifts more quickly when party elites have more governance autonomy, as opposed to those in situations more constrained by party-linked groups. He suggests a strong party leadership would facilitate party change because it puts forward a

more united policy front. Party dominant elites could be constrained by party-linked groups on adopting an elite-preferred agenda, and where these groups are absent and have weaker influence, politicians' autonomy is enhanced, giving them maximum leeway to take positions (Karol, 2009, p. 134). I incorporate the level of autonomy of leadership within my framework.

Additionally, the literature on populism highlights the central role of populist leadership in consolidating the ideological components of the party platform and uniting voters staying around the often radical platform. Charismatic populist leadership is crucial in initiating and sustaining populist mobilizations. It serves as a focal point for the collective action of the mass. Populist leaders function as an "empty signifier," as *the name* of a new identity (Laclau, 2005b, p. 96). This new political identity mobilizes voters who otherwise would not be united because of their heterogeneous socioeconomic backgrounds (i.e., race, religion, etc.). Populist leaders, who are often the party's founder, assert heavy influence on the ideological basis of the new party. Their political writings, which were widely distributed among voters through brochures or newspapers, serve as the vital guideline to devise future platforms and as strong signals to the electorates in promising the party would bring more just democratic accountability to the hard-working and oppressed people.

1.2.3 Normative Debates on Populism

Here, I briefly address the normative debate of populism, especially on whether populism is an antithesis of democracy. Populists construct "the people" with a strong emphasis on insider-outsider differentiation. When such emphasis becomes excessively sensationalized, populists then invent the *supremacy* of the will of the "people" or the just side, trumping all other dissimilar ideas. Populism becomes incompatible with democracy when mobilizers indistinguishably denounce and intentionally deprive others' democratic rights to voice out

(Panizza, 2005, pp. 28-31). This is also why the 2020 US presidential election differs from a usual competitive election. The insider-outsider differentiation was excessively manipulated and reinforced by Republican political leaders. As a result, Trump managed to convince his followers that the election result was fraudulent and did not represent people's interests. Trump supporters only found the arguments presented by what they perceived as political insiders as trustworthy. Arguments from political outsiders were significantly weakened simply by the outsider "evil elites" label. Regardless of the mounting evidence to validate the election result, emotions and loyalty to "the people" can trump logical reasoning, especially political leaders excessively propagandize the irreconcilable conflicts between the "the just people" and the "evil elites". On one important note, when Vice President Pence admitted to the Democrat's electoral victory, Trump supporters immediately categorized Pence as a coward and a political outsider; they did not act in accordance with their partisan label, instead they conformed with the leader-centric (or Trump-centric) label of "the people." Collectively, the Trump example and the charismatic leadership literature provide us sufficient reasonings to believe that the visions of charismatic leaders often serve as the core of populist politics.

Nevertheless, we must not forget the chameleonic nature of populism. Other than the emphasis on restoring popular sovereignty from elites' oppression, populism is void of any systematic ideology. The construction of "the people" must extract from the specific socio-political context within each populist movement. To the extent of seeking representation, populism converges with principles of democratic governance. It is compatible with democracy insofar as "populism plumps the rights of the majorities to make sure that, by intervening, their interests are not ignored as they commonly are" (Worsley, 1969, p. 247). The supply-side explanations of populism point to the decline of the effectiveness of political institutions in

creating the fertile ground for populist movements. As witnessed in Europe, the process of European integration undermines the domestic electoral process by limiting the range of policy alternatives for voters and shifting power on the judicialization of politics from the national government to the European Union. The decay of the domestic government's responsiveness gradually contributes to a disjuncture between voters' preferences and policies supplied, leading to votes for anti-establishment parties (Nanou and Dorussen, 2013; Scicluna and Auer, 2019; Berman, 2021). Populism can be a strong corrective force and reveals liberalism's democratic blind spots. Consider one of the examined cases in this thesis. The People's Party was born out of multiple economic depressions between the 1880s and 90s, where landless farmers suffered from high mortgages, high dependence on the crop lien system, monopolistic railroad rates, etc. Not only was the 1890s movement a story of intense democratic effort helping farmers to fight against economic oppression, but also it is often being considered as a progressive force contributing to the passing of 1920s anti-monopoly legislation (Goodwyn, 1976, p. 114). This section does not intend to resolve this normative debate on populism and democracy, instead it asks the audience to consider arguments from both sides, especially given the existing variant of right-wing populism found in the US and Europe shares a negative and authoritarian undertone. Equating populism with anti-democratic ideologies is inaccurate and does not help us to decompose the origin, effect, and end of populist movements.

1.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The examined cases include the United Farmer of Alberta (UFA) and Social Credit, which are Canadian parties, and the People's Party in the US. I adopt the most similar research design, suggesting the cases share significant variations on the dependent and explanatory variables to make the comparisons valuable (see Chapter 2 for the theoretical framework). These

cases share key similarities, securing the comparative study from confounding variables. First, these four populist movements are the most representative examples of agrarian populism or agrarian radicalism in democratic countries (Canovan, 1981). They share a similar socioeconomic base of farmers who became extremely vulnerable to the broader changes invoked by industrial modernization and economic depressions in 1893 and the 1930s. Existing political parties did not effectively respond to the farmers' demands of issuing sufficient economic reliefs and regulating monopolies and large businesses, which subsequently forced them to form independent alliances and to institutionalize into political parties as conditions worsened. "The people" mobilized within each populist movement were largely farmers, whereas the "evil elites" were the (railroad) monopolies, banks, financials groups, and large businesses. These shared similarities in socioeconomic interests and origins of the movements do not limit the scope of the proposed framework (see the end of Chapter 2). Instead, they enable the thesis to conduct comparative analyses by focusing more on the internal dynamics of party leadership in shaping the progression of each populist movement.

Second, the three populist parties were immediately born out of populist movements, instead of being political parties who shifted to a populist platform. UFA consolidated into a formal party from the existing farmer alliance after the election of 1921, winning 38 out of 61 seats in the general election of Alberta, a province in Western Canada. In 1935, a new political party Social Credit was born during the years of economic depression, out-competing UFA by winning 56 out of 63 in the Alberta general elections. Similarly, the CCF, which was founded in 1932, consolidated from a number of socialist, agrarian, and labor groups. It had the first major electoral victory in 1944, securing 47 out of 52 seats in the general election of Saskatchewan, a Canadian province that borders the United States to the south. Last, in 1890, the People's Party

in the United States preceded existing groups of the Farmers Alliance, the Greenback Party, and the Union Labor Party. Contrasting with the three Canadian parties who started locally and primarily governed in Alberta and Saskatchewan, the People's Party movement was larger in scale. It secured over one million popular votes in the Presidential election of 1892 and had won a number of Congressional seats in Kansas, Nebraska, and North Carolina throughout the 1890s.

It is important to draw distinctions between the populist parties freshly born out of movements, and those later adopted a populist agenda. Conventional party politics within democracy is not as leader-centric as populist politics. Populist politics mobilizes voters because the party leader presents them with a *radical* vision to reform a society that quells their resentments and fear from economic and social changes. By radical, I do not imply a negative connotation; instead, I refer to the often wholesale nature of a populist reformist agenda. The political vision laid out by populist leaders tends to differ from existing party policies drastically. Consider the examples where Trump guarantees voters to address immigration issues by building a US-Mexico border wall or where Social Credit's leader Aberhart promises to address the economic distress in 1935 by issuing a monthly social dividend to all adults. Compared to new populist parties, existing parties will face more limitations in promising a new radical platform given the possibility of losing the existing voter base and constraints by party-linked interest groups. Comparatively, new populist parties share fewer of these concerns. They have successfully consolidated into parties from mass mobilizations where voters rewarded them for their radical vision.

Third, plummeting agricultural prices was a shared economic condition giving rise to all three populist moments. Nonetheless, crop prices fluctuate across time, though not as severe as these cases. It is natural to suspect that populist parties "die" or become less attractive once the

severe economic conditions that first give rise to them become alleviated. However, this is not the case for the UFA and anti-fusionists within the People's Party. For the Social Credit and fusionists within the People's Party, increasing grain prices and recovering the economy were important factors shaping the leaders' decision-making on the direction of the future party platform. I elaborate on this alternative price restoration hypothesis in detail at the end of each case study chapter.

Last, as illustrated above, the examined parties all achieved significant electoral success. UFA and Social Credit secured more than 70% of the legislative seats in most elections. The People's Party gained tremendous traction in the 1890s and within American academia. The thesis does not examine the Douglas Credit Party in Australia or the Social Credit Party in New Zealand because they never managed to build coalitions to become a major political force and thus do not meet the case selection criterion. It will be interesting to examine why the social credit theory did not localize well in these two countries, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. At the end of Chapter 2, I detailedly discuss the scope of the proposed theory after illustrating its theoretical foundations.

1.3.1 Data

The paper employs quantitative and qualitative evidence from three types of sources to measure the dependent and independent variables. First, I draw evidence from various primary sources, including legislation bills, articles, and work written by populist leaders and newspapers to examine the changes in rhetoric and policy of these populist parties. I use legislation bills and electoral performance archived on official government websites to identify the change in the relative positions of parties on policy issues. I focus on the differences between the proposed and passed legislation as populist leaders tend to assess the amount of governing performance

pressures the party confronts. To examine shifts in party rhetoric and policy, I review works written by populist leaders, such as the monetary governance proposal *Social Credit* written by C. H. Douglas. Social Credit's leader in Alberta William Aberhart widely distributed his modified version of Douglas's economic theory as campaign and party platforms in the *Social Credit Chronicle* newspaper and *Social Credit Manual*. Similarly, the UFA populist leader Henry Wise Wood often published articles to broadly discuss the corrupted political environment and root causes of the economic depressions on the party-issued newspaper *The U.F.A.*, which is archived digitally online. This party-run newspaper was issued to subscribed users to discuss socioeconomic issues and the party's stance and solution to them. The *Grain Growers' Guide* is often referenced for sources of party-published theoretical discussions on political and social issues including free trade, monetary reform, and quasi-socialist principles, although "often being inconsistent." (Macherphon, 1953, pp. 28-29) Similarly, the People's Party and its predecessor organizations have issued regional newspapers such as *Farmer's Alliance* and *Topeka Advocate* starting in the 1880s long before running in the 1892 Presidential election. These works are vital evidence as they documented the idealized governance and the proposed political solutions populist leaders employ in electoral campaigns to mobilize voters.

I also examine secondary evidence from previous political, sociological, and economic work that analyzes the cause and timing of the decline of the populist elements within each movement. As discussed in the literature review section, I adopt a different definition of populism than the existing North American agrarian populist movements. Hence, I survey these works to adjudicate the timing of the party's demise suggested in the existing literature and in this thesis. Finally, to measure the occupational composition of the electoral districts, I investigate official government census and archival records for electoral and legislative results

and statistics on agricultural statistics such as the size of farms (acres), number of farmers and employees, etc.

The rest of the thesis is organized in the order of arguments presented in the introduction. Chapter 2 lays the theoretical foundation of the thesis with the operationalization of the dependent and independent variables. I build on the existing literature of party strategic change and populist movements to layout testable hypotheses. At the end of the chapter, I provide an overview of the macro results of all four cases before I dive into each case study. Chapters 3 to 5 detailedly investigate these cases, in the order of the UFA, Social Credit, and People's Party, to present the causal mechanisms accounting for variations within the outcome. Chapter 4 ends with a cross-case comparison between the UFA and Social Credit to isolate the effect of populist leadership strength on facilitating changes in party platforms when the occupational distribution remains the same. It also briefly addresses how different electoral rules within Alberta interact with the distribution of socioeconomic interests to shape the making of the party platform. Chapter 5 explores the within-case variations in the People's Party where two different outcomes are observed: fusionists chose to tone down the populist platform and cooperate with the Democratic party, whereas the anti-fusionists chose to insist on the populist platform. In the last chapter, the thesis concludes with a discussion of the implication of the proposed theory on shedding light on the ongoing right-wing populist movement led by Donald Trump in the United States.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundations

2.1 DEPENDENT VARIABLE

How do populist parties die? Specifically, the thesis examines the demise of populist parties that are consolidated from populist movements within democratic societies. Populist parties die in two ways: 1) the party abandons its populist principles for building a larger coalition and manages to win the first election after changing its party strategy; the party shifts into a non-populist platform, and populism ends in *programmatic failures* or 2) the party sustains its populist principles but suffers from *electoral failures* as it does not build a sufficiently large coalition to win future elections. Here, the empirical puzzle is, during a time of crisis, that is, when parties are failing to build a winning coalition, why do some populist parties manage to change their party platforms, whereas others stick with their guns and die populist. Table 1 below presents a more detailed categorization of the outcomes using the rhetorical and policy aspects of populism, per the adopted definition. On one important note, the two-by-two characterization of the outcome presented below *is not* a causal argument suggesting different combinations of broad (or narrow) policy and rhetoric platforms cause the populist parties to end in one of the two ways described above. These categorizations are *comparative* in nature and claim that the ranges of party rhetoric and policy become *broader or narrower* when the populist movement ended compared to when the party was first in office. To explain why some parties manage to change, whereas others fail to, we need to bring in other explanatory variables.

Table 1: **Categorization of the Outcome**

Policy \ Rhetoric	Rhetoric	Narrow	Broad
Narrow		<p>Programmatic Failure</p> <p>Social Credit toned down the populist elements by narrowing its rhetoric and policy.</p>	<p>Electoral Failure</p> <p>Anti-Fusionists within the PP insisted on its broad rhetoric and designed policies narrowly.</p>
Broad		<p>Electoral Failure</p> <p>UFA sustained its narrow rhetoric addressing farmers as "the people" and broadened policy platform.</p>	<p>Programmatic Failure</p> <p>Fusionists within the PP broadened rhetoric and policy to join forces with the Democratic party.</p>

Note: PP stands for the People's Party in the United States.

By rhetoric, I am concerned with the question "who composes of 'the people.'" By policy, I am concerned with who the proposed and passed party legislation appeals to.

By rhetoric, the paper concerns the question of which strata of the population populist leaders refer to as "the people." The composition of "the people" is a strategic construct, as opposed to an all-inclusive concept, by populist leaders as a mode of mobilization. "The people" serves as a signal to the voter base on who the party promises to represent and prioritize when delivering future legislation. *By policy*, this paper examines which strata of class interests the proposed and passed party legislations appeal to. Last, narrow and broad describe the degree of inclusiveness in the rhetorical composition of "the people," such as along single-class line¹ or mixed-class line². For the policy dimension, these terms also characterize the range of the voter base that party policies intend to appeal to. Using these categorizations, "narrow" and "broad" provide an analytical illustration of the changes in the populist characteristic for each party's platform from a rhetorical and policy perspective.

¹ Consider the UFA party where populist leaders narrowly referred to "the people" as Albertan farmers.

² Consider the Social Credit party where populist officials broadly referred to "the people" as both urban and rural dwellers, or the petite bourgeoisie, who were suffering from the economic depression and lack of purchasing power.

For the policy dimension of populism, I specifically focus on when and why populist leaders tone down the often wholesale or radical reformist elements within their old platform. During the pre-electoral mobilization stage, populist leaders develop a captivating electoral platform by publicizing the promises to deliver massive reforms to restore popular sovereignty once elected. Nevertheless, because of this reformist nature, many promised legislation would often confront severe pushback from other powerful interest groups. Hence, with the pressure to deliver concrete socioeconomic performance, party officials may tone down the reformist elements by compromising and cooperating with “the elites” to reach a political middle ground. Depending on the specific movement, party leaders may choose to only broaden (narrow) party rhetoric or party policy, or both. In the case of the Social Credit and fusionists within the People's Party, they ended with *programmatic failure* by choosing to abandon the populist characteristics within their party platforms. The prior toned down its populist agenda by narrowing its party rhetoric and policy to deliver more concrete economic performances. Similarly, fusionists compromised with the Democratic party by discarding many radical visions laid out in its official Omaha Platform of 1892. They broadened the rhetorical composition of “the people” and strategically targeted a broader electorate by fusing with the democrats.

On the contrary, UFA and the anti-fusionist within the People's Party partially sustained the radical populist elements within their party platform, and both parties ended in electoral failures. In its later years, the UFA still narrowly addressed farmers as “the people,” yet they made various attempts to broaden the policy platform to join forces with other labor groups to obtain more radical monetary relief for Albertan dwellers who were suffering from the Great Depression. Similarly, the anti-fusionists within the People's Party kept its broad populist rhetoric addressing middle-lower class farmers and laborers as “the people,” yet they only

narrowly delivered and designed policies to farmers in Georgia, where they managed to gain the most popular votes in the 1904 and 1908 US Presidential elections. I describe the dependent variable with more historical details at the beginning of each case study chapter. When the party only broadens (narrows) one dimension of the party platform, a *mismatch* between the composition of “the people” and party legislation exists. Note, this mismatch itself does not cause these parties to end in an electoral or programmatic failure. Rather, it is the result of populist leaders’ successful and failed attempts to change the party platform during its time of crisis. In the next section, I lay down the theoretical mechanisms that facilitate or hinder the ability of populist parties to change.

2.2 EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

Political parties could become ineffective to attract voters and suffer from electoral and popular push backs for various reasons, such as broader social and economic changes, party leader-invoked procedural or performance legitimacy crises, etc. During these times of crisis, parties face urgent electoral pressures to change their party platform in order to rebuild a winning electorate base. To explain why some parties could abandon their populist platforms to build broader coalitions, whereas others do not and suffer from electoral failure, we must both consider the external and internal determinants that constrain party leaders’ decision-making processes. On one note, I investigate party strategies used in different levels of elections for the United States and Canadian cases. For the People’s Party in the US, I primarily focus on party strategies used in the Presidential elections and only examine Congressional elections when an influential populist party leader was involved. I discuss this with more details in Chapter 5. For the two Canadian parties, I only analyze the party strategies used for competing in the provincial general election of Alberta, where Social Credit and UFA initiated their populist movements and

achieved the most significant electoral success. As surveyed in the literature review section, to explain the making of a new party platform, one must not only consider the conditions that facilitate or delay changes in platforms, but also the external constraints dictating the set of election-winning strategies available to parties. Below, I separately address each dimension and how they interact to shape the party's ability to change.

First, for any party to win in the democratic electoral system, it must build a sufficiently large constituency to obtain some minimum percentages or the majority of the seats. To engineer an effective platform, the party must consider the electoral rules and the specific compositions of the electorates, whether characterized by class, race, or other traits. The former dictates what percentage of the interests the party must capture to secure an office, whereas the latter determines what type of popular interests the party must attend to. Since most electoral districts within these cases adopted the first-past-the-post system, the proposed framework only seeks to explain populist parties' behaviors under this specific electoral institution. At the end of this chapter, I discuss to what extent this assumption on electoral rule discounts the external validity of the proposed theory. Drawing data from official government censuses.

I use the *occupational distribution* within the labor force as a proxy to operationalize the composition of the electorate's interests. Indeed, voters' political interests cannot be perfectly grasped with a single-dimension occupation variable. Nevertheless, it is an accurate proxy because the three examined parties are all agrarian populist parties that were born from similar socioeconomic conditions and shocks. From 1870 to 1930, American and Canadian farmers suffered from plummeting crop prices, high mortgages, and occasional drought. During the pre-electoral mobilizations, grain prices dropped lower than the costs of production; farmers could not afford the seed for the next-year plantation in severe cases (cite). As a result, farmers

could not pay back loans and suffered from high mortgages, forcing them to default their farmlands and become landless farmers. These economic adversities gave rise to the three populist parties that became the political vehicle representing the interests of farmers or of “the people.” I categorize the occupational distribution of the labor force as homogenous if more than half of the people within the electoral districts are employed in the agricultural sector, as opposed to white/blue collars, professionals, etc. The occupational distribution is categorized as heterogeneous when the agricultural sector is not in the majority of the labor force. Tables 2 and 3 below summarize the occupational distribution for the two Canadian provinces and the United States from 1870 to 1951 when the parties were in power. For the Alberta province, the agricultural sector composed around 50% of the labor force when the UFA and Social Credit were in power as a populist party from 1920 to 1944. For these two parties, securing the farmer base would make them win the provincial election. On the contrary, the US labor force statistics indicate that farmers are less in the minority, composing only 40% of the labor force in 1890 when the People’s Party entered the electoral stage. It was once close to the majority from 1870 to 1880 and gradually declined over time.

Table 2: **Occupational Distribution of the Labor Force in Alberta, 1911-51 (percentage)**

Alberta	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951
Agricultural	49.9	52.8	50.9	49.0	32.5
Professional/Managerial	7.9	10.5	9.9	10.6	14.0
Other White Collar	6.4	9.6	9.3	9.4	14.7
Blue Collar	29.6	20.0	22.4	22.1	28.3
Service	6.3	6.6	7.7	9.0	10.0
Not Stated		0.1		0.1	0.6

Source: The table is calculated by Sinclair (1975) using data in the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Census of Canada, 1961, Bulletin 3.1-2.

Note: Sinclair constructed the table by collapsing census categories. While the result is far from ideal, it is the best could be achieved with the available data. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding error.

Table 3: Labor Force Status of the Population in the US (In Thousands), from 1870 - 1910

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Total Labor Force	12506	17392	23318	29073	38167
Employed Agriculture Force	5949	7714	9148	10382	12388
Employed Agriculture Force (Percentage)	47.6%	44.4%	39.23%	35.7%	32.46%
Employed Nonagricultural Force	6557	9678	14170	18691	25779
Male					
Total Labor Force	10670	14745	19313	23754	30092
Employed Agriculture Force	5552	7119	8379	9404	10582
Employed Agriculture Force (Percentage)	52%	48.3%	43.4%	39.6%	35.2%
Employed	5118	7626	10934	14350	19510

Note: This data is provided by the Bureau of the Census office. It includes people 16 years old and over. I also include the statistic for the male population since women were not allowed to vote before 1920. The table (Series D 11-25) is located on page 127.

Second, parties would have a higher success rate in altering their strategies when the initiators of change, often being dominant party leaders, are less constrained by other powerful coalition and interest groups. Less constrained leaders would have more governing autonomy to implement their envisioned strategy (Karol, 2009). Following Karol's differentiation of leaders (more autonomy vs. more constrained), I create a dichotomous variable *populist leadership strength* to capture the effect of leadership (or leader-centered dominant coalition) in influencing the making of a new party strategy. I primarily rely on one criterion to evaluate leadership strength: the success of a populist leader in shaping the stances of the proposed and enacted party policies close to his ideological preferences. The paper assumes that most of the ideological divergence between populist leaders and other opposing coalitions derives from the clashes between policy-seeking and vote-seeking electoral strategies. Vote-seeking model of party behavior assumes that the primary goal of a political party is to win elections (Down, 1957). Policy-seeking parties regard policy purity to be more important than gaining votes or access to political offices. In practice, vote-seeking and policy-seeking strategies are not necessarily a trade-off. Nevertheless, I argue this trade-off is present among populist parties because of the

often wholesale and radical nature of populist platforms in promising “the people” to reform the unjust system. Populist leaders are assumed to be more policy-seeking, rather than vote- or office-seeking. One may find this assumption as an inaccurate characterization. Nevertheless, as illustrated in chapter 2, I distinguish between movement-born populist parties and parties that later adopt a populist platform. For established political parties in majoritarian two-party electoral systems, it involves tremendous risks³ to drastically change their platforms because it may lose a significant part of the voter base whose ideological preferences are more moderate on the given political issue. For elections in the United States, losing a significant amount of voter bases would largely decrease the party’s chances of winning the Presidential election. I argue for parties that later adopt a populist strategies, there may be a natural selection effect among dominant party officials to choose a presidential candidate that is not radically policy-seeking. On the contrary, voters rewarded these new movement-born parties for their radical reformist agendas by electing them into office. Under the first-past-the-post electoral rule, populist parties rise in times when a large amount of voters’ socioeconomic interests are underrepresented. Populist leaders organized these movements with a strong policy-seeking goal to represent the oppressed people.

Below, Table 5 provides a list of the populist leaders and their oppositions within each party. Opposing coalitions are assumed to be more vote-seeking and share a different vision on party strategy compared to the policy-seeking populist leaders. Weak leadership means populist leaders are more constrained by its opposing coalitions or other intra-party groups, whereas strong leadership means populist leaders have more autonomy on implementing a new party platform. Noted that, there are two observations within the People’s Party: fusionsists (programmatic failure) and anti-fusionists (electoral failure). From 1890 to 1896, anti-fusionists

³ Polarization of the political environment could change the size of the risk.

(populist) had a weak leadership in the party compared to fusionists groups. After the 1896 US Presidential election, fusionists within the party ended by abandoning its populist platform. From 1896, anti-fusionists dominated the making of party strategies for what was left in the People's Party and suffered from electoral failure in 1908.

Table 4: Lists of Populist Leaders and Their Opposition

Case Leader	UFA	Social Credit	People's Party
Populist Leaders (policy-seeking)	Henry Wood; Robert Gardiner	William Aberhart; Ernest Manning	Anti-fusionists: Thomas Waston; Henry Lloyd
Opposing Coalitions	John Brownlee; Richard Reid	Socialist-minded Officials	Fusionists: William Bryan; James Weaver
Leadership Strength	Weak Leadership; Large internal divisions	Strong Leadership; Some internal divisions	From 1890 to 96: Weak leadership within the party => Fusionist; From 1896 to 1908: Strong leadership among anti-fusionists

During a time of crisis, for vote-maximizing party officials who value holding political offices more than the pursuit of a populist agenda, they would be more willing to change the party platform, such as by compromising with the previously denounced elites and toning down the radical aspects of the party platform. Electoral pressures would induce vote-seeking officials to be more prone to change compared to the populist leaders who heavily participated in leading the movement and sometimes founding the party. When the party is failing to build a winning coalition, this policy-seeking and vote-seeking tension within a populist party becomes more salient in determining the making of a new party platform. However, policy-seeking and vote-seeking strategies *do not always* invoke a trade-off, especially when “the people” represent the majority political interests among all electorates. Consider the case of Alberta where farmers compose around 50% of the labor force. When farmers have a majority status, delivering beneficial policies and staying true to “the people” (farmers) are both policy- and vote-seeking party strategies. Only when “the people” have a minority status, or the occupational distribution

is heterogeneous, narrowly designing beneficial policies for farmers will invoke a trade-off between policy- and vote-seeking party strategy. When farmers are in the minority, in order to build a winning coalition for the next election, populist parties must broaden their electoral platform to appeal to the political interests of “the people.” Yet, policy-seeking populist leaders are more unwilling to compromise on platforms compared to other vote-seeking officials because populists would regard these concessions as failing to represent “the people” and succumbing to the “evil elites.” Populist leader recognizes the party’s electoral dilemma, yet because the perceived policy trade-off is too large given the minority status of “the people,” he would be more reluctant to abandon its populist platform because it would hinder the party’s ability to deliver to its original voter base. Below, I formalize this first hypothesis.

H1: If the occupational composition of the labor force is heterogeneous (i.e., farmers are not the majority of the labor force), then during a time of crisis, a strong populist leadership will hinder the party’s ability to broaden its platform to win future elections because policy-seeking populist leaders are reluctant to tone down the (radical) reformist elements.

Vice versa, if the occupational composition remains heterogeneous, then during a time of crisis, a weak populist leadership would increase the party’s ability to change its platform because other vote-seeking party officials, who have less insistence of pursuing a wholesale reform agenda, balance with and constrain the influence of populist leaders. However, the effect of a strong populist leadership reverses when the composition of the electorate’s interests is more homogeneous. When “the people” are in the majority, the perceived trade-off between

policy-seeking and vote-seeking strategies becomes much smaller for populist leaders. During a time of crisis, the populist leader and other party officials realize the need to change. Populist leaders would be more willing to shift the electoral platform to become less populist, that is, to tone down the radical characteristics of the previous platform. Thus, the populist party would benefit from a strong populist leader who could unite the party to rapidly change its platform. Below, I formalize this second hypothesis.

H2: If the occupational composition of the labor force is homogenous (i.e., farmers compose more than half of the labor force), then during a time of crisis, a strong populist leadership will enable the party to successfully change its party platform for securing larger electoral coalitions by abandoning its radical characteristics.

Vice versa, if the occupational composition remains homogeneous, the populist party will suffer from difficulties and delays in changing its party platforms when a weak populist party leader cannot resolve the internal divisions around party agendas. Even though policy-seeking and vote-seeking party strategies are not necessarily in a trade-off, if a strong opposing coalition within the party has a different vision for the party platform, then these internal divisions resulting along with a weak leadership would hinder the party's ability to make successful or timely changes. Below, Table 6 presents a two-by-two theoretical framework summarizing these hypotheses with outcome predictions for the four observations.

Table 5: **Theoretical Framework**

Composition \ Leadership	Strong	Weak
Heterogeneous	Fail to Change => Electoral Failure Anti-Fusionists led by Thomas Watson in the PP refused to abandon its populist platform.	Able to Change => Programmatic Failure Fusionists within the PP joined the Democrats
Homogeneous	Able to Change => Programmatic Failure Social Credit had a successful re-brand of its party platform	Fail to Change => Electoral Failure UFA suffered from internal leadership divisions and failed to change its platform.

Note: PP stands for the People's party. Composition refers to the distribution of occupations within the electoral districts. Homogeneous and heterogeneous occupational composition indicate whether farmers are in the majority or minority of the labor force, respectively. Strong or weak leadership refers to how much influence the populist leader have on shaping the party platform.

2.2.1 Macro Results

Before diving into the details of each case, I first provide a general roadmap on the macro results for all four observations (three cases), which are summarized in table 7 below. The duration of populism indicates the years when the populist party was in office. Note that the end date indicated in the duration row does not necessarily suggest the political party is dissolved. As discussed, a populist party ends either with programmatic failure by abandoning the populist characteristics, Social Credit and Fusionist within the People's Party), or with electoral failure (UFA and Anti-fusionists within the People's Party). The Social Credit party won its first major electoral victory in 1935, and the populist aspect of the Social Credit died in 1944 when the party shifted into non-populist platform. The Social Credit as a non-populist party was still in power after 1944 as the changes made to its old party platform were tremendously successful. The

Social Credit only lost its majority standing in Alberta after the 1967 general election. By contrast, the UFA first took office in 1921, and after making several unsuccessful attempts to change its party reform in the mid-1930s, the party was succeeded by Social Credit and never returned as a significant political actor after losing the 1935 election. Second, the outcome categorization indicates the *changes* within each party's rhetoric and policy strategy when the movement ended, compared to those when the party was first elected. Occupational composition and leadership strength⁴ are the primary explanatory variables, and the amount of trade-off between policy- and vote-seeking strategies perceived by populist leaders vary by the farmers' majority or minority status.

From 1921 to 1944, the UFA and Social Credit took political offices back to back as populist parties in Alberta, a province where farmers composed around 50% of the labor force. When the electoral crises for the UFA occurred in 1933, as the economic depression worsened farmers' welfare, and for the Social Credit occurred in 1940, as it lost 35% of its seats in the Legislative Assembly, party officials, especially populist leaders, well understood the urgent need to change its party platform. Within the UFA, the tension was in between its convention and the elected cabinet on the issue of whether the party should join forces with other labor groups within and outside of Alberta to shift into a more distributive economic relief platform. The UFA convention was the predecessor of the party, and after the 1921 election, it remained an active channel for rank-and-file to submit policy resolutions. As the depression started in 1930, many farmers were becoming landless and suffered from high mortgages. Party founder Henry Wood and leader Robert Gardiner, a more reform-minded populist, appealed to broaden its policy platform to cooperate with workers. The majority status of the farmers made them more prone to

⁴ I include the examined lists of populist leaders and opposition leaders within each party for an easier reference for the macro result section.

changes as they perceived the trade-off between policy-seeking and vote-seeking strategies being small. Though as populist leaders, the economic depression forced them to believe that cooperating with other worker organizations, though would make them become less populist by definition, was necessary and would tremendously increase farmers' welfare. However, both UFA party premiers John Brownlee and Richard Reid opposed these efforts. Instead, they suggested the party should focus on securing its farmer base, instead of becoming a socialist party. Concerned with the already-high provincial debt, they found this new leftward trend for obtaining more economic relief for farmers and workers as unfeasible and financially burdensome. From 1931 to 1935, the internal ideological division on the directions of the future party platform was intense among UFA officials, which eventually hindered the party's ability to rapidly devise an effective strategy to maintain its farmer base.

Comparatively, during its time of crisis, the Social Credit party, who defeated the UFA in the 1935 Alberta election by promising to restore purchasing power, could quickly modify its party platform because of a strong populist leadership. The radical social credit plan propagandized by its leader William Aberhart did help the party win its first election, but also received tremendous pushbacks from other financial and business groups. Many Social Credit's legislations were struck down by the court, including its central campaign promise of delivering a monthly dividend. After the 1940 election, Aberhart and other officials noticed the party's declining popularity after losing significant membership and 20 out of 63 seats in the legislative assembly. Similar to the UFA case, the majority status of "the people" within Alberta made Aberhart, despite being an extreme reformist, perceived this policy-vote trade-off as relatively small. Starting in 1940, Aberhart dropped many previous policy platforms and toned down the hostility in rhetoric toward the financial elites. Some divergence existed within the party on the

issue of whether the Social Credit should join the socialist Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. Nevertheless, these divergences were a small force within the party. Aberhart has always governed as a strong populist leader, and he set off the party's momentum in rebranding its platform prior to his death in 1943. The new premier Ernest Manning, who has been active within Aberhart's coalition, shared similar visions to change the party platform.

On the contrary, from the two within-case variations in the People's Party, we see the effect of strong populist leadership reverses and would hinder the party's ability to reform during a time of crisis. The People's Party made its major electoral entry after winning 1.4 million popular votes in the 1892 Presidential election. In 1896, the party split into two groups - fusionists and anti fusionists - who separately supported and opposed abandoning its third-party status to join the Democratic party. The fusionist group in the People's Party ended in 1896 with a programmatic failure by adopting the Democrat's platform to broaden its coalition, whereas the anti-fusionists held onto its populist platform after 1896. The People's Party, led by anti-fusionists, officially dissolved in 1909 after losing three consecutive Presidential elections. Some party officials, such as James Weaver, the Presidential candidate in 1892, well understood the challenges in becoming a successful third party within a two-party system. Hence, they have always supported a fusionist plan with the Democratic Party with the price of dropping some of its demands. Prior to the 1896 Presidential election, the People's Party had a weak populist leadership as the fusion trend became more popular as many officials realized sustaining a third-party status would face tremendous challenges in a two-party system. The two groups temporarily compromised on the selection of Presidential nominees by agreeing to share a ticket with the Democratic Party on the Presidential nomination with William Bryan and run a separate populist ticket on the Vice-Presidential nomination with Thomas Waston. After losing to the

Republicans in the 1896 debacle, the People’s Party further split into two camps. Fusionists gave up the third-party status and abandoned many reformist elements within its old platform. Anti-fusionists led by Waston and Henry Lloyd perceived the policy-vote trade-off of fusion as large, and joining the Democratic Party would be a complete abandonment of “the people.” Anti-fusionists held strong opposition to the free silver panacea depicted by the Democratic Party depicted and denounced its platform would not yield fundamental changes to repair the economic system. From 1900 to 1908, populists ran and lost all Congressional seats by 1902 and lost the three Presidential elections, obtaining fewer popular votes each time. The People’s Party officially dissolved in 1909.

Table 6: **Summary of Macro Results**

Category \ Case	UFA	Social Credit	Anti-fusionist PP	Fusionist PP
Duration of Populism	1921 - 1935	1935 - 1944	1892 - 1908	1892 - 1896
Occupational Composition	Homogeneous	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous	Heterogeneous
Policy-Vote Trade-off	Small	Small	Large	Large
Populist Leadership Strength	Weak	Strong	Strong	Weak
Populist Leaders	Henry Wood; Robert Gardiner	William Aberhart; Ernest Manning	Anti-fusionists: Thomas Watson; Henry Lloyd	
Opposition Leaders	John Brownlee; Richard Reid	Socialist-minded Party Officials	Fusionists: William Bryan; James Weaver	
Outcome	Electoral Failure	Programmatic Failure	Electoral Failure	Programmatic Failure
Outcome categorization	Broadened Policy; Narrow composition of rhetoric	Narrowed policy and rhetoric	Broad rhetoric and narrowed policy	Broad policy and rhetoric

Note: Homogeneous suggests farmers are in the majority of the labor force for the examined electoral unit. Heterogeneous suggests farmers are in the minority of the labor force.

2.3 SCOPE AND EXTERNAL VALIDITY

This section briefly discusses the scope of the proposed theoretical framework. First, the theory is only applicable to parties in democratic countries where fair elections are held. I assume the making of a winning party strategy is largely dictated by the distribution of electorates' socioeconomic interests. This assumption is crucial to explain why the anti-fusionists or UFA failed electorally because its party strategy did not effectively represent the percentage of interests required to win. Anti-fusionists' party strategy narrowly delivered to farmers, who were in the minority, while the UFA party strategy did not deliver the massive economic reforms demanded by farmers, who were in the majority.

Second, even though the selected cases are all agrarian populist parties, I argue the proposed theory also provides insights for other variations of populism. Because of the shared agrarian characteristics, the thesis can safely use the majority (minority) status of farmers as a proxy to measure the distribution of the electorate's socioeconomic interests. For the existing right-wing populist movement in the US, ethnicity, education level, and religion are often used as proxies to determine voters' likelihood to support the Republican party led by Trump. However, having a heterogeneous or homogeneous composition in voters' electoral interests is not unique to agrarian populist parties. For every case of populism, we should be able to determine whether "the people" that each party represents have a majority or minority status within electoral districts. The proposed theory applies to the extent that one can measure the degree of heterogeneity of voters' primary interests using appropriate economic and social proxies. Nevertheless, it is much more difficult to operationalize the distribution of populist interests and determine its majority status within the electoral districts for the ongoing right-wing populist movements in Western European and the US. Compared to the three examined parties, these

movements are not single-dimension class-based mobilizations, which makes occupation alone an inaccurate proxy. This thesis provides some venues to measure the heterogeneity of popular interests by taking advantage of the class-based nature of these populist parties and movements. However, further research is needed to systematically measure the degree of heterogeneity within other types of populist movements.

Third, this framework is primarily concerned with movement-born populist parties, instead of parties that later adopted a populist platform. I made this distinction within the research design section. I argue movement-born populist parties are more leader-centric compared to normal parties who have gradually become more entangled with and constrained by other powerful interests groups. Additionally, it is more accurate to characterize populists in movement-born parties as more policy-seeking instead of vote-seeking. Indeed, more research is required to theorize and empirically test whether these two identified differences are accurate. As of now, I make a more conservative conclusion suggesting the proposed framework is limited to explaining behaviors of movement-born populist parties.

Fourth, the framework assumes political parties operate under the first-past-the-post electoral rule since most of the electoral districts within the three cases adopted this electoral institution. The thesis does not explore the effect of different electoral institutions (e.g., majoritarian or proportional representation) in shaping the party's ability to reform. The electoral system dictates what percentage of voters' interests the party must capture to secure a winning office. Hence, the composition of the electorate's socioeconomic interests largely dictates the set of election-winning party strategies within democratic elections. Under the first-past-the-post system, citizens cast votes on one candidate, who wins after securing the highest number of votes. By contrast, when operating under multiple-member plurality-at-large or proportional

representation (PR-STV), candidates do not necessarily need the most votes to win an electoral seat. To win a seat, they only need to secure a minimum percentage of votes for the ticket to be valid (PR-STV) or obtain enough votes to be placed in the top two or five candidates (plurality-at-large). The First-past-the-post rule enables the thesis to operationalize the heterogeneity degree of the occupational distribution as the majority or minority status⁵ of farmers (“the people”). For districts using PR-STV or plurality-at-large, the current heterogeneity coding would subsequently change. Different electoral institutions would shape the set of winning strategies for parties. Under a five-number single transferable vote system, farmers would not need to compose more than 50% of the labor force for the district’s composition to be classified as homogeneous. For example, if a populist party seeks to represent a specific constituency with conservative interests that only constitutes 20% of the total electorate (consider right-wing populist parties in Europe), it must broaden its policy platform to win the election under first-past-the-post rule; however, under the proportional representation system, it could still win seats in the district.

As illustrated in the table below, from 1921 to 1959, some electoral districts such as Edmonton, Calgary, and Medicine Hat within the Alberta province once adopted a mix of electoral rules, including single transferable vote, plurality-at-large, and instant-runoff voting. However, this thesis does not examine these variations because UFA did not actively target these constituencies as they were cities of urban dwellers. Farmers were mostly in the majority for all other electoral districts. I acknowledge that this is an extremely simplified version of how different electoral institutions shape the making of party strategy. Future research should further explore the effect of proportional representation on shaping party strategy and conditions of party change using Western European populist parties.

⁵ Farmers compose more than or less than 50% of the labor force.

Table 7: **Electoral Rules of Alberta, from 1905 to Present**

Elections	Edmonton	Calgary	Medicine Hat	Rest of Alberta
1905	First past the post (FPTP)			
1909	Double-member plurality-at-large		FPTP	
1913	Double-member	FPTP		
1917	FPTP			
1921	Five-member plurality-at-large		Double-member	FPTP
1926	Five-member single transferable vote (STV)		Double-member STV	Single-member instant-runoff voting
1930 - 1935	Multiple-member STV		Single-member instant-runoff voting	
1959 - present	FPTP			

Note: This table was generated by internet users on the Wikipedia page for the Alberta general election. I have cross-validated the type of electoral systems and dates with other sources.

Last, the thesis does not theorize how the strategic interaction between populist parties and existing parties would alter the behaviors of populist leaders when in electoral crises. The theoretical framework makes the assumption that the making of all parties' electoral strategies is largely dictated by the distribution of the socioeconomic interests within electoral districts. Put in another way, the socioeconomic interests determine electorates' voting orientations, and winning elections requires parties, populists or not, to secure some combinations of a majority of the votes. Hence, populist and non-populist parties' behaviors and their interactions are causally accounted for by the distributions of voters' interests. Nonetheless, this is a valid criticism of the framework and a theoretical aspect for future improvements. Overall, the proposed theory explains the demise of movement-born populist parties in democratic countries that primarily use the first-past-the-post electoral rule. In the next three chapters, I conduct detailed case studies to demonstrate how the interaction between an occupational distribution and populist leadership strength shapes the populist party's ability to change its party platform when it is failing to build a winning coalition.

Chapter 3: United Farmer of Alberta

3.1 THE 1935 DEBACLE

The Alberta province is located in Western Canada, bordering the US state of Montana to its South. It is one of the three Canadian prairie provinces, covered by grassland, plains, and lowlands. During the Canadian Confederation of 1905, the Alberta province was founded in September that year, holding its first general election in November. By 1911, the provincial population⁶ grew to 374,295 from 73,022 in 1901, with the agricultural sector composing close to 50% of the occupational force (Canadian Census Bureau, 2016). The predecessors of the United Farmer of Alberta (UFA), including the Alberta Farmers' Association and Non-Partisan League, were politically active in Alberta around a decade before the party's first electoral victory in 1921. These non-partisan alliances mainly served as organized interest groups, lobbying to promote agricultural interests. From 1905 to 1921, the Liberal party and the Conservative party were the dominant actors competing for the majority status in the Alberta Legislative Assembly, where Liberals won all four general elections.

Two events motivated these non-partisan farmers' alliances to become more politically active and institutionalize into a political party: general performance decay of the Liberal party and under-representation of farmers' economic interests. Liberal officials were exclusively urban employers and lawyers of substantial means (Finkel, 1989, p. 18). Beginning in the 1910s, the Liberal government was accused of consistent suspicions of large-scale inefficiency and corruption (Thomas, 1959). Notably, in the Great Waterways Railway scandal of 1910, the Liberal officials were both inactive and secretive on the cost and progress of constructing the

⁶ The total population of Alberta grew to 588,454 by 1921 and 796,169 by 1941 (Canadian Census Bureau, 2016).

new railway. The deal was later found to be corrupted, where program supervisors intentionally reported a much higher construction cost (Macpherson, 1953, p. 25). This scandal attracted more than a year of popular discussions and newspaper coverage, giving rise to popular demands for a more honest administration. The scandal created a popular basis for distrusting the old party system. Additionally, the turning point for the farmers' alliance to institutionalize into a party came in 1911 when farmers' collective efforts within and beyond Alberta to lobby for reducing the protective tariff were defeated. Farmers made collective demands to the Liberal government, which was also a major actor in federal elections, appealing for "reciprocal free trade with the US in natural products and agricultural implements" (Sharp, 1948, p. 43). However, in the 1911 Canadian federal election, the Liberals were defeated by the Conservatives, who largely denounced the efforts to lower the tariff agreement with the US as a national threat of weakening Canadian economic sovereignty. Liberal's defeat motivated the grain growers to become more politically active to fight for legislative solutions to relieve them from slumping crop prices and high freight rates (Sharp, p. 48).

In 1921, UFA successfully mobilized voters to secure 38 out of 61 seats using a narrow farmer-oriented populist platform. From 1920 to 1930, the Albertan labor force was predominantly composed of farmers (Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1961). Winning the rural population of Alberta meant winning the provincial election. UFA addressed the manufacturers, financiers, and all other plutocratic classes as anti-democratic elites, who offered "mutually conflicting explanations of the present depression, from which the farmers and city industrial workers are the greatest sufferers" (The U.F.A., 1922). For the UFA, "the people" were narrowly addressed as Albertan farmers. Party officials insisted that the political interests of farmers and laborers were different where "each group must retain its distinct identity as an economic class",

and that there was no room for a joint electoral platform with other labor parties (Wood, 1921; Macpherson, 1953, p. 53). Urban dwellers in Alberta were alienated from the UFA government as they were barred from membership in the UFA convention (Sinclair, 1975, p. 12).

On the policy front, the party actively worked on passing resolutions that were beneficial to the farmers, such as regulations on the banks and the railway rates. Along with the UFA, farmer organizations from other prairie provinces such as the United Farmers of Manitoba and Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Associations were collectively calling for "immediate reduction of the freight rates" to restore the "depreciated value of all farm products" (Murray, 1922). In its first term, UFA issued much economic relief legislation. Notably, the establishment of the Alberta Wheat Pool in 1921 created a centralized marketing operation to guarantee its participating farmers with the "highest average price at which the crop can be sold competitively in final markets" (Patton, 1930, p. 175). The pool was intended to stabilize agricultural prices for farmers who were suffering from large fluctuations in grain prices. Similarly, the Debt Adjustment Act of 1923 was intended to protect farmers by avoiding "long and costly court appearances" and offering the "creditors enough" to prevent them from deserting the whole province⁷(Jones, 2004).

In addition, the "people vs. elites" rhetoric also shaped UFA's organizing structure as its leaders publicized the party's nonpolitical tradition. Because populist leaders often exacerbate the hostile relationship between "the just people" and "the evil elites," they differentiate themselves from regular politicians. Populist leaders brand themselves as being reluctantly political and only become politicians to restore a just representation to the hardworking people. For UFA, the non-partisan (or non-political tradition) mostly came from its party founder Henry

⁷ Nevertheless, this debt adjustment effort was criticized by many scholars as ineffective, "offering solace, but no real satisfaction"(Jones, 2004, pp. 63-64).

Wood. As an old Missouri populist in the 1890s, Wood's beliefs on practicing a group government model can be traced to the populist tradition of the American midwest (Rolph, 1950; Macpherson, 1953). Wood believed party systems would hinder democratic representations because a party's primary goal is to compete for voters to secure future offices; hence, the office-maximizing nature of the party will inevitably make them amorphous, balancing between various interests and less capable of delivering results to the people. The party will gradually become an "instrument of plutocracy and of special interest" to exploit the people, failing to be an adequate instrument for social change (Wood, 1922). Instead, Wood envisioned parties to mobilize people across occupational group lines⁸, independent of electoral vehicles. Even on the eve of elections, Wood was staunchly against the UFA in becoming a political party and refused to serve as the party's premier. He continued to publicly denounce the traditional party system a year after the 1921 election, suggesting large political groups have the "false conception of being efficient", where in fact, they have been "hopelessly wrestling with social problems" (Wood, 1922).

Even though some party officials acknowledged the caveats of the old party system as Wood pointed out, they eventually compromised on institutionalizing into a party after realizing a formal electoral vehicle was necessary to secure desirable legislation. Noted that, even though Wood was not serving as the elected UFA premier, he was worshiped as the ideological totem among Albertan farmers and influenced UFA's internal matters through the UFA convention until his retirement in 1937. Meanwhile, Wood's political philosophy⁹ in calling for more direct democratic representation translated into the UFA's organizing structure. During the electoral

⁸ Wood assumed that occupation-induced interests are stable, which makes mobilization across occupational lines form a solid basis to unite people with a shared interest (Irvine, 1976, p. 228).

⁹ Indeed, there was many theoretical and practical shortcomings of Wood's group-government theory. See Rennie (2000) for a thorough discussion (pp. 214-215).

mobilization, UFA publicized a vision of replacing the party system with a business government based on delegate democracy with constituency control (Macpherson, 1953, p. 28). The new governing platform promised to achieve constituency autonomy, where delegates of local geographical units would directly control the legislature through constituency conventions (Macpherson, p. 26). The Legislature would also interact with the public business on its merits and not along party lines.

This delegate democracy model was a particularly credible and appealing campaign promise because, prior to the 1921 election, the model effectively mobilized and organized Albertan farmers into the UFA convention¹⁰. Just as one local newspaper commented: the electoral victory of the UFA was attributed to them installing “an unshakable confidence in the group (government) idea’s among voters.” It successfully captured the imagination of farmers in realizing a true democracy in Alberta (The Grain Grower’s Guide, 1921; Rennie, 2000, p. 220). The UFA organization would annually elect its presidents, secretary, and various delegates to directly represent its members. Wood was elected annually to manage these conventions from 1916 to 1930. This informal governing body within the UFA frequently met to discuss resolutions¹¹, which were directly sent in by the rank and files. For example, the 1920 convention received 248 resolutions. After winning the 1921 election, locals were asked first to send their resolutions to a UFA district convention representative, and the annual convention would select and discuss those being important. Before winning its first election, the delegate democracy convention model worked productively as the submitted resolutions and issues were debated concretely and vigorously (Macpherson, 1953, p. 66). However, after the 1921 election, the

¹⁰ UFA’s membership has grown significantly from 2,000 members since it was founded in 1909 to nearly 31,000 in 1920. Its membership declined after the excitement of 1921 election and varied between between 12,000 to 15,000 from 1921 to 1925.

¹¹ After the 1923 convention, resolutions were further delegated to specific subsequent conventions to address. For example, the Rural Municipal Association would address all resolutions on municipal questions, and the Dairymen’s Association would address all resolutions on dairies (Macpherson, 1953, p. 65; Grain Growers’ Guide, 1923).

traditional party system largely hindered the continuity of this delegate democracy model, as several difficulties emerged in exercising the UFA group government theory with the newly elected legislature and cabinet members. There was an increasing tension regarding legislative responsibilities between constituency associations and the elected members. By the end of 1925, both constituency autonomy and the delegate democracy model were overridden by the elected cabinet government as the local constituency's power to directly submit and formulate policies became smaller. Convention delegates gradually became subject to the demands of the cabinet on policy issues¹² (Macpherson, p. 90).

In the 1935 Alberta general election, UFA lost all of its seats to the new Social Credit party and ended in an electoral debacle as a populist party. UFA mostly sustained its previous populist platform in its final years as it adopted a similar “people vs. elite” rhetoric and designed farmer-centric policies. As illustrated in the next section, the party was in an electoral crisis between 1930 and 1935 as it received increasing criticisms from farmers and gradually lost its electorate base to the new social credit movement. Among party officials, a major division on party platforms emerged beginning in 1930. The party tried to broaden its policy platform, yet these attempts were not successful. Hence, I categorize the UFA case as an electoral failure as it failed to design a new effective platform to win after its electoral crisis.

3.2 A SOCIALIST AGENDA VS. MONETARY CONSERVATISM

As rapidly as it rose by sweeping the Liberals out of office in 1921, the UFA exited politics after losing all of its seats and winning only 11 percent of the popular vote. UFA's decline was surprisingly sudden. Both in the 1926 and 1930 Alberta general elections, the party

¹² See Chapter 3 of Macpherson 1962 for a thorough discussion on UFA's Democratic Group Theory in Practice.

had secured 43 and 39 seats out of 63 seats, respectively, with its farmer-oriented platform¹³. Only until the early 1930s, when the Great Depression crushed grain prices, farmers gradually became more disappointed with UFA's economic performance and challenged its governing legitimacy. This section explores how a weak populist leadership greatly hindered UFA's ability to consolidate on a united electoral platform, which eventually made it fail to deliver the massive economic relief longed for by its farmer base during the Great Depression.

The first major change in UFA's party leadership occurred before the 1925 election. The first party premier Herbert W. Greenfield resigned per the request of the UFA caucus because of his governing incompetency, especially given the party's non-partisan background (Jones, 2004, p. 69). He was succeeded by his Attorney General John E. Brownlee as the new premier to compete in 1925. Greenfield had no previous experience in government and relied extensively on Brownlee for policy strategy in his first term (Foster, 2004, p. 75). Brownlee was among the initial leadership candidates along with Greenfield in 1921. However, many party officials objected to Brownlee's leadership because of his lawyer background, and the 52-years-old farmer Greenfield, though with no government experience, was a more attractive candidate at the time (Thomas, 1959, p. 205). Nonetheless, despite Greenfield's inexperience, UFA's political performance in the first term largely satisfied the farmer base, issuing various legislations designed to relieve the farmers from economic burdens. The party sustained its populist platform and stayed true to the farmers' demands on agricultural issues.

Under Brownlee's leadership, the UFA became more attentive to economic interests beyond those of the farmers (McMath, 1995). Compared to Wood, Greenfield, or other party officials, who mostly had a farmer background, Brownlee came from an elite lawyer family and

¹³ UFA also secured similar popular votes in the 1926 and 1930 elections, around 39%, as their first 1921 election, which was around 28.92%.

held stronger monetary conservatism beliefs than his predecessors. Despite his lawyer background, Brownlee, the UFA performed well in the 1925 election securing more seats in the assembly compared to 1921. The Brownlee government became more unresponsive to the resolution passed by the UFA constituency and preferred to formulate policies with views of “non-farmer experts” (Finkel, 1989, p. 20). Nonetheless, as a growingly conservative government, Brownlee’s administration delivered progressive results benefiting agricultural interests in its second term. Beginning in 1929, crop prices rapidly declined due to the Great Depression in the US. Wheat prices dropped to 0.45 Canadian dollars per bushel in 1933 from 2.31 in 1919. Similarly, Oats and Barley were less than a third of its 1919 price (Canadian Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1951). As the economic depression worsened in the province, farmers began to have trouble purchasing coming-year seeds. The droughts in southern Alberta further worsened farmers’ economic conditions.

With increasing economic burdens, many within the UFA convention began to retrieve their previous reluctance to cooperate with other labor groups. In 1930, Wood retired as the President of the UFA convention and was succeeded by Robert Gardiner, a more radical leader. Gardiner was a member of the parliament for Medicine Hat and embraced the democratic socialism proposed by labor groups. Wood and Gardiner realized that farmers alone did not have the capacity to engineer relief policies. Though as populist leaders, they were willing to broaden its platform to cooperate with labor groups outside of “the people” because it was the only way to battle the depression and improve farmers’ welfare. Hence, starting in 1930, many UFA convention members actively joined forces with the Canadian Labor Party and other political groups to establish the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, which was intended to be the first farmer-labor political party. Labor groups were pushing for a new socialist agenda, which

members of the UFA convention welcomed. In 1931, the UFA convention publicized the “Manifesto to the Farm People of Alberta,” which proposed resolutions to address agrarian demands regarding markets, prices, and the credit system. The manifesto also made a reference to “cooperative commonwealth” for the first time, urging farmers to “work out detailed plans for the transition” to the new farmer-labor party (Gardiner, 1931; The U.F.A, 1931). By 1932, the UFA organization and labor groups actively appealed to the Brownlee government to build a community “free from the domination of irresponsible financial and economic power” by making all means of production and distribution, including land, socially owned and controlled by either voluntary organized groups of producers and consumers (Smith, 1932). Similarly, major public services and utilities would be owned in common by a public corporation that attends to the people’s elected representatives (1932).

In the meanwhile, the UFA government was anything but socialist. Brownlee-centered coalitions were heavily opposed to the party’s left-leaning trend and concerned about formulations of radical monetary reforms with heavy government intervention. The UFA government-controlled provincial revenues and followed a laissez-faire policy. Between 1921 and 1930, the provincial debt increased tremendously, rising from \$95 million to \$117 million as a partial result of the Alberta Wheat pool and efforts to reimburse its creditors (Finkel, p. 16). He was unwilling to distribute massive relief packages as demanded by farmers out of concerns of further worsening the debt (Finkel, 1989, p. 21; Roberts, 1995, p. 540). As a price stabilizing institution, the Alberta pool proposed to guarantee at least the price of wheat at \$1 per bushel as its price constantly dropped below \$0.5 per bushel between 1930 to 1935 (illustrated in figure 1 below). However, because of the high provincial debt, Brownlee proposed further lowering the

guaranteed price to \$0.8 per bushel, yet farmers' severe conditions were not effectively alleviated (Foster, 2004).

Brownlee made an unexpected exit in party leadership due to the exposure of his sex scandal in 1934 (Foster, 2004). By July, Richard G. Reid, who was the Treasurer and Minister of Health and Municipal Affairs, succeeded Brownlee as the new UFA Premier. Similar to Brownlee, Reid denounced the far-left efforts led by Gardiner in joining the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation as an "unholy amalgamation" (Rennie, 2004, p. 113). After taking office, Reid delivered much agricultural-specific relief legislation such as purchasing cattle from farmers who could no longer feed, signing cost-sharing agreements with the federal government and railways to relocate farmers fleeing the dust belt, etc. He further promised to deliver universal health insurance and an Agricultural Industry Stabilization Act to protect farmers' revenue that would be used as farms' operating costs from creditors (Rennie, p. 117). However, Reid's policy initiatives did not meet farmers' expectations. The ideological division between the UFA organization and the Brownlee government made the labor groups within the Common Cooperative Federation perceive the UFA as a reactionary political enemy instead of its Alberta affiliation. Albertan farmers well understood this problem and became more disappointed and cynical toward the governing legitimacy of the UFA government. Desperate farmers and workers had little sympathy for the government's concern about its debt, which rose \$160 million in 1935 (Finkel, 1989, pp. 16-20).

Table 8: **Internal Division with the UFA**

Leader Stance	UFA Organization	UFA Cabinet
Leader Coalition	Henry Wood (Convention Leader) Roberts Gardiner (Convention Leader)	John Brownlee (Elected Premier) Richard Reid (Elected Premier)
Political Stance	Cooperate with the labor groups to push for a more socialist economic relief policy agenda; Appeal to become less populist	Oppose the leftward socialist agenda with worries of wor- sening the high provincial debt; Appeal to stay populist

Note: PP stands for the People's party. Composition refers to the distribution of occupations within the electoral districts. Homogeneous and heterogeneous occupational composition indicate whether farmers are in the majority or minority of the labor force, respectively. Strong or weak leadership refers to how much influence the populist leader have on shaping the party platform.

By 1934, it was too late for the UFA to change its party platform. A new Social Credit movement was born in Alberta. While denouncing UFA's governance, it promised to solve the Great Depression by proposing a series of monetary reforms, and most importantly, issuing every citizen monthly credit to purchase goods. Farmers transferred their hopes of democratic accountability to his new movement, which promised to use a delegate democracy model that the UFA had gradually lost (Macpherson, 1953, p. 92). Table 8 above summarizes this internal policy division among the party leadership. The weak populist leadership of Wood and Gardiner hindered UFA's ability to broaden its policy platform to join forces with other labor groups. UFA's depression initiatives, including on social security and debt reduction, were not as drastic as the farmers needed. Although Reid issued many agricultural-specific legislation in 1934, most UFA farmers were already attracted by the radical social credit vision Aberhart promised to deliver (Coe, 1938). As illustrated in Figure 1 below, when UFA left offices in 1935, the surveyed prices for the three crops were still relatively low compared to those in 1921, which was already in decline. UFA's populist platform became an unappealing option not as a result of

restored grain prices, but because farmers were in far worse economic conditions compared to them in 1921, and its economic packages were simply not enough to alleviate farmers' grievances.

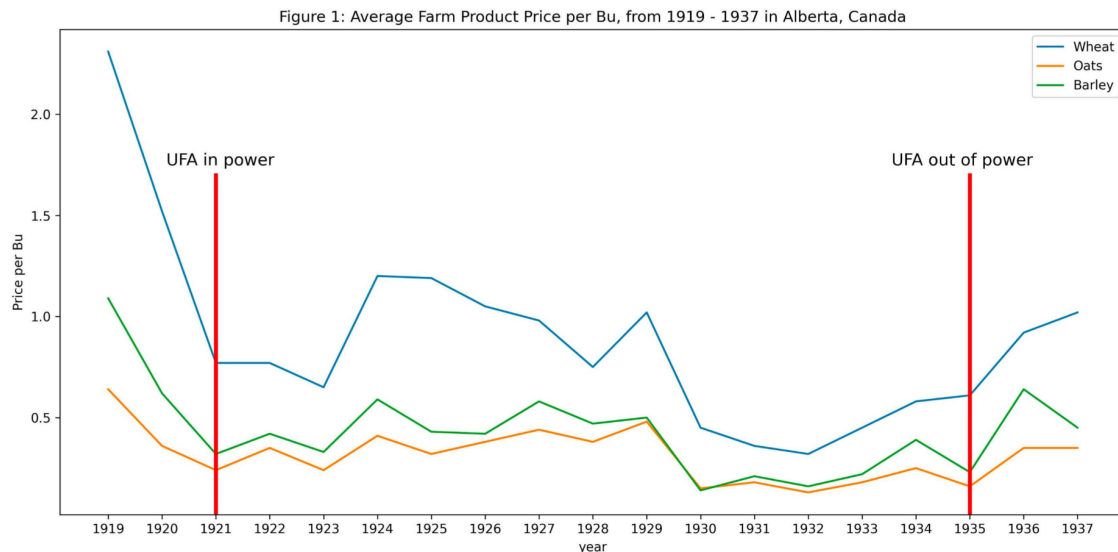


Figure 1: The price data is retrieved from the Handbook of Agricultural Statistics published in May 1951 by the Canadian Dominion Bureau of Statistics. I only surveyed three main crops produced in Alberta: wheat, oats, and barley. The prices are specific to the Alberta province.

Macpherson (1953) attributed the demise of UFA to changes in its party structure. UFA's failure to sustain a delegate democracy model through the convention greatly limited its ability to respond to the demands of rural economic relief. His argument accurately captures UFA's dilemma. Beginning in 1925, the Brownlee-led government increasingly constrained Wood's policy-seeking influence within the party. Had the UFA not abandoned its delegate democracy model, efforts led by strong populist leadership to join forces with labor groups would have been more successful in delivering more timely Depression reliefs. Nonetheless, just as Macpherson commented, farmers' economic burden made them demand policies "bolder than any they (UFA) could induce the UFA government to entertain" (Macpherson, 1953, p. 92).

Chapter 4: Social Credit Party

4.1 PROGRAMMATIC FAILURE IN 1944

In 1935, the new movement-born Social Credit defeated the UFA in the Alberta general election. Social Credit swept through provincial-wide races; it not only won all 38 seats from the UFA but also defeated the Liberals and the Conservatives, who had a small but stable voter base. Similar to the UFA, Social Credit won its first election where the agricultural sector also comprised 50% of the Alberta labor force; hence, this broad farmer-worker electoral platform made it successfully secure almost 90% of the seats (56 out of 63) in the Alberta Legislative Assembly. Between 1933 and 1935, the Alberta Social Credit leader William Aberhart evangelically preached a new radical vision that promised to solve the economic depression with a simple plan of social credit, which made desperate farmers and laborers swarm into this new movement.

The social credit theory originated from Clifford Douglas, an English engineer who was dissatisfied with the economic system. Throughout the 1920s, Douglas published many works such as *Credit Power and Democracy* (1920) and *Social Credit* (1924) to criticize the capitalistic pricing systems and distribution being controlled by irresponsible oligarchies and financial groups. The central thesis to Douglas's philosophy was the "A+B" theorem to highlight his emphasis on purchasing power. The theorem suggests that payments made by productive units can be divided into A) "all payments made to individuals" (e.g., wage), and b) "all payments made to other organizations (e.g., raw material and bank charges). A represents "the rate of flow of purchasing power to individuals, but since all payments go into prices, the rate of flow of prices cannot be less than A plus B." Because "A will not purchase A plus B," to make it

possible for all the product to be purchased, “a proportion of the product at least to B must be distributed by a form of purchasing power” that is not described in A (Douglas, 1920, pp. 21-22). And this distribution process can be done by creating new money, such as distributing social credit dividends to producers and consumers to “enable them to price the product below cost” (Macpherson, 1953, p.108).

Originally, Douglas’s publications were only economic proposals for the Treasury and the general legislative assembly to consider as complements or substitutes to its existing plan. Noted that, Douglas largely condemned financiers instead of capitalism and did not offer a socialist solution, which he regarded as ineffective as it would further centralize the economic and political power. The social credit proposal was brought up at the party and attracted a few UFA officials such as Henry Spencer and William Irvine. Many similarities can be drawn between Douglas and Wood’s philosophy on economic reform. Wood blamed the lack of monetary freedom and sufficient purchasing power on the “perversion of commerce,” whereas Douglas blamed it on the “perversion of production” by finance (Macpherson, 1953, p.97). However, most UFA leadership repeatedly rejected Douglas’s proposal throughout the 1920s as they refused to commit themselves to a wholly new social credit program. In 1933, William Aberhart used Douglas’s theory as his mobilization platform. Aberhart had been active as a social gospeller in Alberta since the early 1920s. He organized events at the Calgary Prophetic Bible Conference and started a radio show, “born again,” which was estimated to reach about 300,000 people where up to 65 percent of whom lived in Alberta by 1934. Began in late 1932, he started to inject social credit doctrines into his radio sermons and organized study groups, composed of economically insecure workers, farmers, and small businessmen, to discuss means to implement the social credit theory in practice (Finkel, 1989, pp. 29-30, 39).

During the pre-electoral mobilization period, the Aberhart-led movement resembled many populist characteristics. Social Credit had a very broad definition of “the people,” ranging from independent farmers, middle-lower class urban laborers, to town professionals, or the “petite-bourgeoisie” (Conway, 1968). The primary appeals were targeting those who became extremely insecure about society during the Depression. It attracted the support of the poor and insecure and was rejected, and was rejected by, the better-off groups. Aberhart heavily denounced financiers as the “evil elites,” who were perverting private ownership and enterprise as “wildcat profiteering” (Conway, p. 498). The *Social Credit Chronicle*, a party-run newspaper, regarded big capital, employers, and banks as the enemy and “capitalistic lions” who would try to obstruct the bringing in of Social Credit principles (Social Credit Chronicle, 1934).

On the policy front, Social Credit promised voters a radical monetary reform agenda. Lack of purchasing power was (inaccurately) publicized as the ultimate cause of the Depression instead of overproduction or unemployment. Aberhart promised to issue monthly credits, not as cash, but in the form of “non-negotiable certificates” to every citizen, whether employed or not, to provide for the essential needs of life. Citizens, 21 years and older, would receive a \$25 credit, and children up to 16 years old would receive a \$5 credit (Aberhart, 1935, pp. 19-21). The government was illustrated as a “gigantic joint-stock company with the resources of the province behind its credit,” where each citizen is a shareholder and entitled to a basic monthly dividend. In addition, Social Credit also promised to install a price control system to fix a just price for goods and services, which would enable people to buy back the goods they created as producers (Conway, 1968, pp. 497-500). Implementation of these schemes would require “monetization” of the province's natural resource wealth, collection of income raised by a turnover tax from every sales transaction occurring within the province. Details of Aberhart’s plan were documented in

the *Social Credit Manual*, which was widely distributed throughout Alberta (Finkel, pp. 34-35). Ideally, this new monetary reform would rapidly restore citizens' purchasing power and increase consumption, which would subsequently boost production and employment within the local economy.

Despite many similarities with the UFA in its promise of representing "the people," the two parties differed greatly in their party structures. Many describe the movements initiated by UFA in 1921 and Social Credit in 1935 as democratic and authoritarian populism, respectively (Macpherson, 1953; Sinclair, 1975). Aberhart had always exercised strong leadership within the party. He directly controlled the process of candidate selection prior to the 1935 election by personally interviewing all nominees, and only the ones who received his nod could become official nominees. Prior to the 1935 election, the social credit organization adopted the delegate democracy model as the UFA, where the representative bodies would discuss and instruct delegation. It granted controls to the rank and file on voting for resolutions submitted to the meeting. However, it is only democratically organized in its procedures. The Aberhart-centered coalition still largely determined the policy platform of the league (Finkel, pp. 31-32).

By the 1944 Alberta general election, the Social Credit administration was no longer a populist party, either in policy or rhetoric. It was explicitly against many legislations and government intervention proposals once publicized by Aberhart in the early 1930s (Finkel, p. 73). The next section illustrates this process of reform and emphasizes the effect of leadership on expediting this process.

4.2 AN EMPTY PROMISE

Many scholars have written on how Aberhart clearly did not understand the Douglas theory of Social Credit. He repackaged the theory as a deceptively ideal economic panacea for

the desperate middle-lower class citizens. Here, I do not discuss the analytical differences between Aberhart and Douglas's versions of the social credit theory. Many obvious logical fallacies were within both versions¹⁴. As sound as the plan was for economically-depressed citizens, it was disastrous for large business and financial interest groups. They heavily denounced and pushed back against Aberhart's radical visions. The Financial Post described Social Credit's electoral victory as a crisis for stockholders and criticized Social Credit's empty promises "like a fantasy of Santa Claus" (Conway, 1968, p. 529). Many business experts doubted the feasibility of the plan as the Calgary board claimed the program was "beyond the capacity of the Alberta people to pay"; they unrealistically relied on the monetization of natural resources, which was both "impracticable and impossible" (Finkel, p. 36).

Nevertheless, despite criticism from financiers, Aberhart strongly persisted on the platform and was reluctant to make any narrow concessions on toning down his reformist agenda. In 1936, the party established codes, including price schedules, hours of work for employees, hours of operation for firms, etc., for various service industries, retailers, and wholesalers to regulate price-fixing and setting of production quotas. Although these codes were welcomed by small businesses, they were severely attacked by large firms who were afraid that the code would make the government an "arbiter of prices and business practice." From 1937 to 1939, Aberhart brought more radical legislation to the table such as regulating business practices with license fees and reforming the tax system by proposing to impose no direct taxation (Finkel, pp. 42-50). In his first term, the Aberhart administration incessantly pushed forward monetary legislation, yet the Court struck down the majority of them as unconstitutional. Similarly, the monthly-dividend plan, which was both politically and economically infeasible, never materialized in Alberta.

¹⁴ See Macpherson (1953) and Irving (1959) for theoretical discussions.

Along with Social Credit's piling up legislative failures, popular dissatisfaction with the government's performance in delivering the central campaign promise also increased. By the early 1940s, Social Credit was in a time of electoral crisis, gradually losing popular support and attractiveness among its broad voter base. The party lost 19 seats to the Independent Party in the 1940 Alberta general election and barely secured a majority in the popular vote with only a few thousand votes difference. The Independent was composed of many different groups, including people who were unsatisfied with Aberhart's failure to deliver campaign promises and conservative business-oriented groups (Finkel, p. 69). However, despite failing to deliver most of its campaign promises, Social Credit was still an appealing option in the years leading up to the election. On the one hand, Aberhart's administration managed to deliver constructive social welfare performances in its first term. The administration made impressive progress in pushing toward state health for all (Finkel p. 43). Most importantly, Alberta's economy has gradually recovered from the economic depression with steadily increasing grain prices (Figure 2 below). On the other hand, the new Independent Party did not have a recognized leader and was loosely organized with a vague campaign platform (p. 89).

Aberhart was well aware of this popularity declining as he saw a significant loss of voter base in his home constituency (p. 70). Many social credit study groups established around 1935 dissolved with a tremendous membership decline after 1937 (p. 76). In the early 1940s, Aberhart realized the urgent need to change its party platform given declines in popularity and increasing electoral pressures invoked by the growing Independent Party and CCF movements. Social Credit dropped all discourses and legislation on delivering the monthly dividend and largely retributed the program's failure to the federal government. Regarding programs criticized for having excessive government interventions, Aberhart toned down its radical rhetoric and

addressed these programs in a more cautious manner with less denunciation. By late 1941, the Social Credit had branded its monetary reform resolutions into a more moderate program of economic redistribution (pp.71-77). Meanwhile, Aberhart had also become more conservative, or more accurately, being less of a radical left leader regarding his economic views. Indeed, electoral pressures from the new CCF and labor movements within Alberta and Saskatchewan, a bordering prairie province, expedited the reform of the Social Credit as the latter became increasingly pressured to differentiate the Social Credit platform from a socialist ideology (p. 81). Nonetheless, willing to abandon the radical populist characteristic within its old platform was not a purely vote-seeking strategy to differentiate the Social Credit from other left-wing parties as Aberhart still withheld his firm beliefs on condemning the financial capital as exploiters of the people's welfare.

On the other hand, along with the recovery from the economic depression, the wartime economy had restored a large proportion of Albertan prosperity. As illustrated in figure 2 below, grain prices steadily increased after 1938, which delayed popular dissatisfaction with Social Credit's poor legislative performance. Indeed, improvements in farmers' and laborers' general economic welfare increased Aberhart's willingness to change the old platform (p. 89). Nonetheless, Aberhart's strong leadership in dictating the party's internal affairs allowed it to rapidly rebrand its platform in early 1940, given some intra-party coalitions appealed to CCF's platform. The majority status of the farmers and labor groups made Aberhart perceive the trade-off between policy-seeking and vote-seeking strategies as being small, and given the restoration of the economy after the depression, cooperating with business interests would attract more investments to the province to benefit the welfare of agriculturists and unemployed labors.

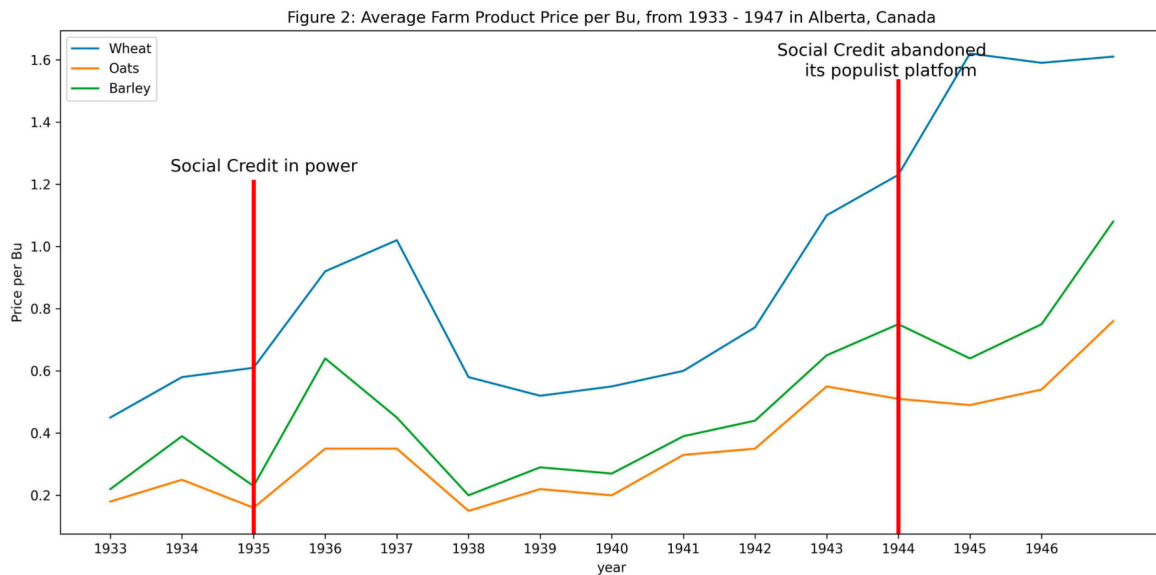


Figure 2: The price data is retrieved from the Handbook of Agricultural Statistics published in May 1951 by the Canadian Dominion Bureau of Statistics. I only surveyed three main crops produced in Alberta: wheat, oats, and barley. The prices are specific to the Alberta province.

In 1943, Aberhart passed away and was succeeded by Ernest Manning as the new party premier. Manning had been Aberhart's "religious protege and his closest associate" in the Social Credit cabinet (Finkel, p. 82). Manning was a social credit populist and a farmer from Saskatchewan. As a politician, he was more pragmatic compared to Aberhart; The Manning administration abandoned the monetary panacea illusion and simply concentrated on the provision of "good government" (p. 2). Although Social Credit had begun its party platform rebranding in 1940, Aberhart's death still expedited this change. While Albertan dwellers were no longer demanding massive economic relief, Manning well understood that many reformist elements in Aberhart's philosophy received little legislative success. Fear of Social Credit's debt and redistributive legislation provoked a capital strike in Alberta as many investors were unwilling to risk its investments given the propagandized tax and fixed price system reforms. Concerning the province's long-term development, Manning dropped much populist rhetoric by showing his wholehearted rejection of socialism and renunciation of Aberhart's strong

interventionism, which was warmly greeted by the financial and business elites. Despite being a more conservative party, the administration continued to pass farmer-centric legislation after 1944. For example, the Marketing Act established mechanisms for farmers to “centrally pool together to buy materials and ship products,” which subsequently lowered their production costs (p. 92). Social Credit also provided provincial loans to aid farmers in need by establishing a debtors' assistance board to act as an intermediary between creditors and debtors (p. 87). Manning's rebranding efforts were successful. In the 1944 and 1948 general elections, Social Credit secured around 85% of the seats in the Alberta Legislative Assembly.

4.3 CROSS-CASE COMPARISON

This section illustrates the cross-case comparison, summarized in table 10 below, between the UFA and Social Credit. Both cases governed with a homogenous occupational composition where farmers composed more than 50% of the labor force among electoral districts. Farmer's (or “the people”) majority status made populist leaders within both parties believe the trade-off between policy-seeking and vote-seeking party strategies was relatively small. Nonetheless, the UFA ended with an electoral debacle, whereas the Social Credit ended with programmatic failure. As illustrated in the UFA chapter, the party had many internal divisions on whether its future party platform should adopt a socialist agenda. The weak populist leadership led by Wood and Gardiner hindered its ability to deliver a new leftward party platform. UFA made various attempts to broaden its policy platform to join forces with other labor groups to alleviate farmers from the depression collectively. However, these efforts were actively opposed by UFA party premiers Brownlee and Reid, who condemned the party's leftward trend and worried about the increasing provincial debt. As the depression worsened in the 1930s, UFA's failure in delivering farmers the drastic reforms they demanded critically

damaged its governing legitimacy. On the contrary, the Social Credit party benefited from a strong populist leadership centered around William Aberhart to reform its platform in 1940 quickly. Despite having internal divisions in the direction of rebranding, Aberhart managed to appease these divisions and consolidated on a united appearance of party rhetoric and policy. Thus far, I explore the interaction between a homogenous occupational distribution and populist leadership strength in shaping the party's ability to reform. In the next chapter, I explore the within-case variations in the case of the People's Party to demonstrate that the effect of a strong populist leader reverses when the occupational distribution becomes more heterogeneous.

Table 9: **Comparison Between the Social Credit and UFA**

Time \ Cases	Social Credit	UFA
Period 1 (Start)	Farmers in Majority	Farmers in Majority
	Strong Populist Leadership (Aberhart)	Strong Populist Leadership (Wood)
Period 2 (end)	Strong Populists (Aberhart and Manning)	Weak Populists (Wood and Gardiner)
Outcome	Narrowed policy; Narrowed Rhetoric Reformed -> Programmatic Failure	Broadened Policy; Narrow Rhetoric Failed to reform -> Electoral Failure

Note: Strong or weak populist leadership refers to how much the leader influence and unite the party platform according his ideological preferences.

Chapter 5: People's Party

5.1 FUSIONISTS VS. ANTIFUSIONISTS

The People's Party successfully made a third party entrance in the 1890 US midterm elections by obtaining eight Congressional seats, and seven of them were in Kansas and Nebraska. In the 1892 Presidential Election, the party launched a populist crusade winning 11 congressional seats and more than 8.5% percent of the popular vote, which approximated to be 1.04 million popular votes. Like the UFA, the movement began with various farmer alliances and organizations. Since the 1970s, a number of farmer alliances such as the Knight of Labor, (Northern) Farmers Alliance, etc., have emerged in Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, and many other agricultural states. Farmers' increasing economic burden motivated the organization of these alliances. Following the industrial revolution, despite prosperous businesses in railroads and banks, agriculture languished in the United States. From 1890 to 1897, crop prices steadily declined as a collective result of the contraction in money supply, overproduction, and economic depression in the 1890s. As illustrated in table 10 below, prices of wheat, corn, and cotton have tremendously decreased between 30% to 60% from 1870 to 1897. Naturally, the farmers did not find agreements with the overproduction theory to account for such low prices. Instead, they put blame on the railway system, where it would "cost a bushel of corn to send another bushel to market" (Hicks, 1891, p. 60). For farmers who wanted to ship products in the South and West, they rarely had two or more railway companies to choose from, which naturally led them to perceive that the railroad monopolies could selfishly collect whatever rates they chose¹⁵ (Hicks, p. 63).

¹⁵ Here, I only survey what farmers perceived as the roadblocks to agricultural prosperity to identify the origin of their populist platform. Indeed, many factors should be considered to account for the plummeting crop prices or high railway rates. See chapter 3 in Hicks (1961) for a more detailed discussion.

Table 10: **Average Market Prices of Crops, 1870-1897**

Years	Wheat	Corn	Cotton
1870-73	106.7	43.1	15.1
1874-77	94.4	40.9	11.1
1878-81	100.6	43.1	9.5
1882-85	80.2	39.8	9.1
1886-89	74.8	35.9	8.3
1890-93	70.9	41.7	7.8
1894-97	63.3	29.7	5.8

Source: Yearbook of the United States *Department of Agriculture*, 1901, 699, 709, 734. Table from Hicks (1961)

Beginning in the early 1870s, grassroots populist lecturers traveled across the country to mobilize farmers into forming a joint alliance. The use of populist rhetoric was extremely effective in mobilizing farmers suffering from declining prices. Populist lecturers S.O Daw and William Lamb appealed to farmers to “join the alliance and form your cotton yard,” and those against efforts of farmers becoming more politically active “is no good for us” (p. 60). Similar to the UFA and Social Credit, populist lecturers also emphasized their pursuit of a non-political tradition and their general reluctance to run for office. Daw warned farmers to “beware of men who are trying to get politics into this (non-political) organization because the goal of the farmer alliance was to emancipate farmers from the grasp of political tricksters” (p. 64). By 1890, the largest and most organized farmer alliances were the Northern Alliance, also known as the National Farmers’ Alliance, and the Southern Alliance (the National Farmers’ Alliance and Industrial Union), which were based in Kansas and Texas, respectively (p. 97).

During the early 1880s, the Farmers’ Transportation Convention repeatedly condemned the railway system as an “oppressive” and “corrupt” monopoly that was “defiant of all existing law” and called for the inauguration of programs of governmental control with men that were sympathetic with farmers’ adversity (Hicks, 1981, p. 99). Throughout the early 80s, farmers

frequently held conventions across the country to discuss and draft for more specific demands as the total membership of the alliances grew rapidly. Nevertheless, the attendance and enthusiasm for these meetings were largely hinged on farming prices and prosperity (p. 101). Poor wheat prices in 1884 did revive some attendance, but only until the late 80s and farmers' political demands took more concrete forms. In the December 1898 and 1890 conventions, despite the envisioned programs for reforms varied across states and sections within the conventions, the Northern and Southern alliance leaders consolidated on two working proposals: St. Louis and Ocala platforms, which highlighted "a debtor protest against the unreasonable oppression by the creditor classes" (p. 140). In sum, these platforms concentrated on lowering interest rates and railways rates with government interventions, breaking down land monopolies and trust, and supplying more paper money or silver.

Through these mobilizations, farmers increasingly expressed hostility toward bankers, trust, railroads, middlemen, and the muddled currency and demanded remedies to overcome these evil forces. The midwestern Populist moment was a class movement and a progressive social force that should be applauded as "heroic efforts" (Pollack, 1976, p. 51). They promoted "equal opportunity and exact justice in business for each individual" to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth and abolish "all monopolistic privileges and power" (pp. 11-12, 15). Farmers were not nostalgic or backward-looking, per se. They accepted an industrial democracy but opposed its capitalist form and monopoly, which had tremendously impoverished and degraded individuals. "Electricity, steam, compressed air" should be common resources yet have become "the monopoly of the few" to serve the "selfish purposes of avarice and greed" (p. 17). As appealed by Senator Allen of Nebraska, who was an elected People's Party official, in 1894,

the country is “most hopelessly in the grasp of the money power,” and Congress is not “making any attempt to redress their wrongs” (p. 51).

The Omaha Platform of 1892 was the official platform for the People’s Party, including a “broad program of proposals for currency, credit, income tax, government ownership of railroads, and the reclamation of excess lands owned by railroads” (Goodwyn, 1953). In 1892, despite worries of the Omaha Platform being too reformist, most members of the People’s Party were reluctant to tone down their demands to make concessions. Nonetheless, some internal divisions regarding the party’s future platform began to emerge around this time, which later evolved into the fusionist and anti-fusionist divisions. Many within the party understood that their chances to become a major political party were very slim and believed joining forces with the Democrats was the only path for their reformist ideas to be meaningfully implemented. For example, James Weaver, who ran in the 1892 presidential election as a populist candidate, held this fusionist stance. In 1893, Weaver herded people together to rally for the free-silver panacea, regardless of their party or principles (Woodward, 1938). He wrote to William Bryan before the 1894 election suggesting “our people are making the mistake of their lives because now was the time for combining (with the Democrats)” (Woodward p. 242). Nevertheless, fusionist ideas were extremely unpopular within the People’s Party as they just won 1.4 million popular votes as a third-party (p. 119). As Pollack commented, fusion was a desperate move to avoid the fate of other third parties (p. 103). For many populists, fusion meant losing the independent status and momentum to reform. In 1894, the Democratic party primarily promoted the free silver platform to address the depression and farmers’ demands, which many populists did not regard as a solution to repair the system from monopolistic distortions. The *Topeka Advocate*, a radical

vanguard of the People's Party, attacked the free silver platform and largely opposed fusion efforts until 1896.

The St. Louis Convention was held in 1896 to select nominees for the upcoming Presidential election, which became a crucial turn for the People's Party to lean toward fusionist proposals. One week before the Convention, the *Topeka Advocate* continued to criticize fusion efforts by emphasizing the differences between democrats and populists: while the prior prompted free silver, populists wanted "all of the money of the country to be good and of equal purchasing and debt-paying power"(Pollack, pp. 108-110). Nevertheless, fusionist voices have gradually increased and balanced with anti-fusionist groups. Many of them naively believed that they were fusing to use the Democrats' platform to start a more all-embracing radicalism (p. 110). Compared to abandoning its independent status, defeating Republicans, who greedily struck down silver for the selfish interests of gold, became the most important goal. In addition, since its pre-electoral mobilization in the 80s, the People's Party has always confronted difficulties in constructing a national farmer-labor coalition because most populist lecturers had farmer backgrounds and did not know how to reach and convince the laboring masses in the national cities (Goodwyn, 1953, p. 297).

At the end of the St.Louis convention, the two camps temporarily compromised on the selection of 1896 Presidential nominees by agreeing to share a ticket with the Democratic Party on the Presidential nominee William Bryan and run a populist ticket with a different Vice-Presidential nominee. William Bryan was not a populist but a more reform-minded democrat (Pollack, p. 126). Only until the closing weeks of the campaign, he began to acknowledge the People's Party nomination. Nevertheless, Bryan was still an ideal choice for populists because he expressed many groundswell discontent, in a similarly radical fashion as

many populists, toward the economic system. On the other hand, Democrats nominated Arthur Sewall for its vice-president candidate, who was a shipbuilder, national banker, and railway director, had nothing in common with populists, except for prompting the free silver platform (Woodward, 1938, p. 186). Hence, anti-fusionists decided to nominate Tom Waston, who was a fervent mid-roader populist, as the 1896 vice-presidential candidate. However, many members still held strong opposition toward the Democratic Party. Waston believed fusion “is a betrayal of the people’s trust” and condemned it as “the densest political stupidity if party principle is of any value” (p. 111). As echoed by Henry Lloyd, who was an arch-critic of fusion, free silver would not solve the fundamental problem of the system and would only blur the reformist elements collectively decided in the 1892 Omaha platform. For Lloyd, free silver was merely tangential to his money doctrine, and he viewed money as a pure creation of the government, and one of its main functions was to stabilize prices (p. 104). Anti-fusionists “favor free silver as much as they (we) favor fiat money or income tax, and no more.” Watson and Lloyd were ambitious in bringing wholesale changes for the people, including delivering free silver, regulating National banks, and rebuilding the tax system. The rank and file “want to march right on and want no fusion or no corrupt abandonment of a creed in whose sacred keeping is held the longings and the prayer of an oppressed people”(Woodward, pp. 242-243)

Despite running with a ticket shared by Democrats and the People's Party, Republicans won the 1896 election. More officials embraced fusion as the road to reform. With the People’s Party case, we can identify two observations of outcomes. In 1896, fusionists in the People’s Party ended in programmatic failure. Compared to the two Canadian cases, there was no dominant leader at the center of the American populist movement. They could rapidly change its platform because of a weak populist leadership led by Waston and Lloyd, which were

constrained and balanced by the office-seeking fusionists. Most of them chose to broaden the rhetoric and policy aspect of its old party reform to cooperate with Democrats and Republicans in some states such as North Carolina. Many fusionists did not have a strong policy-seeking intention of preserving the purity of policy. Although some conceded to joining the Democratic party in order to initiate more radical changes, they soon realized the naive nature of this plan. In 1886, fusionists did not have a united plan on taking action after joining the Democrats. There was no pattern to fusion as they differed on timing, reasons for its adoption, and intensity of commitment (Pollack, p. 105). Just as Weston predicted, the fusionist turn made the “(Populist) alliance lamb dissolved in the gastric juice of the Democratic lion” (Woodward, p. 248).

Weston-led groups refused to give up their third-party status. They always worried that cooperating with the democrats would entirely bias the reform agenda to free silver, which was one of the least concerning issues within the Omaha platform. Weston was a charismatic populist leader who warmed up reform’s imagination for disaffected and intransigent radical populists. Antifusionists in the People’s Party ended in an electoral failure after losing three consecutive Presidential elections from 1900 to 1908. The party officially dissolved in 1909.

Goodwyn described the essence of American populism as farmers seeking to regain self-respect, which accurately depicts farmers’ ceaseless fights for legislation that would relieve them from mortgages and the fear of becoming landless (1953, p. 56). They hoped to bring changes to the system and prevent monopolies from charging exorbitant prices “for fertilizers and farm implements” (p. 26). Despite the demise of the People’s party, the unprecedented mobilization of farmers and the progressive momentum they left became an essential stepping stone to the progressive era in the 1920s.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis presents a new theoretical framework to explain the end of populist parties. During a time of crisis, the majority (minority) status of “the people,” defined by populist leaders, within electoral districts and the strength of populist leadership will determine the ability of a populist party to change its electoral platform. The majority status of “the people” indicates farmers compose more than 50% of the labor force. A strong populist leadership indicates the populist leader heavily influences the making of a new party platform. When farmers are in the minority, populist parties that are led by strong leaders would have trouble broadening their party platforms because populist leaders perceive a large trade-off between policy-seeking and vote-seeking strategies and therefore are reluctant to make policy concessions. When farmers have a majority status, populist leaders perceive a small policy-vote trade-off and would be more willing to change their respective party platform. Here, parties would benefit from a strong populist leader as he has more governing autonomy to change the party platform rapidly.

As discussed in chapter 2, the thesis primarily explains the demise of populist parties within democratic countries using the first-past-the-post electoral rule. Here, I do not explore the effect of the majoritarian system vs. proportional representation on changing the set of election-winning strategies and the party's ability to change its platform. My intuition is that a proportional representation system would change the thesis's existing coding on the majority/minority status of “the people.” Majority status means the occupation composes more than 50% of the labor force given the first-past-the-post electoral system. Nevertheless, candidates only need to secure a minimum percentage of seats for proportional representation to win, instead of the most seats. Hence, “the people” share a “majority status” as long as it consists of the labor force with a sufficient percentage for parties representing their interests to win some

seats within the district. I understand this is an extremely simplified version of the effect of electoral institutions on the making of party strategy. Future research should further theorize and empirically test the proposed framework for populist parties (e.g., existing right-wing European populist parties) using the proportional representation system.

Additionally, the thesis also assumes the socioeconomic interests of voters can be accurately captured with occupation. This is an accurate assumption given the agrarian and historical background of these populist parties. However, a single-dimension capture of voters' interests will be inaccurate for the existing populist backlash in the United States led by Trump. Existing literature has suggested education level, religion, and ethnicity as useful proxies to measure the degree of heterogeneity of electorates' interests (Naoi, 2020). To determine the majority (minority) status of "the people" for existing right-wing populist movements in the US and Western European countries, further research needs to be done.

Last, the thesis briefly discusses the implication of the proposed framework on characterizing the populist movement led by Donald Trump in the United States. Since the 2016 Presidential election, the Republican party has shifted into a populist platform. First thing first, has the populist aspect of the Republican party ended after its defeat in the 2020 Presidential election, or have the Republicans been trying to abandon its populist platform after realizing its a losing strategy? Compared to the demise of the UFA or anti-fusionists, the 2020 Presidential election was a close race to determine whether the populist Republican has suffered an electoral failure to eliminate themselves from running with a populist platform again. On the other hand, as a result of the capitol hill riot that occurred on Jan 6th, 2021, many Republicans, including the former Vice-President Mike Pence, have condemned Trump's behavior in eroding democratic procedures. However, Trump still has one of the largest popular supporters within the Republican

party. Many Trump voters staunchly believed that the 2020 election result is fraudulent, as Trump has repeatedly propagandized. As of now, it is hard to determine whether the Republican party has decided to abandon Trump's right-wing populist platform. The result of the 2024 Presidential election should shed more light on answering these questions.

Second, as discussed in chapter 2, it is crucial to differentiate between movement-born populist parties, which are modeled in the thesis, and parties that later adopt a populist agenda. To apply this framework to the Republican party, we first need to determine whether Trump is a policy-seeking or voter-seeking populist. If Trump is a vote-seeking leader, then the framework would not be applicable. Nevertheless, as a vote-seeking leader, Trump should be more willing to tone down its populist rhetoric and policy after losing the 2020 Presidential election, assuming he clearly understands that he lost because of failures to build a sufficiently large coalition, instead of election fraud. On the other hand, if Trump is a policy-seeking leader, we need to determine who "the people" are and whether they have a majority or minority status in the United States. Take states in the Rust Belt, for example. "The people" are more likely to share a majority status. As a policy-seeking leader, Trump would be expected to tone down radical elements, rhetoric, and policy, within its old populist platform because of the perceived policy-vote trade-off among Rust Belt states, is small, assuming Trump realizes the populist aspect of the Republican party is in a time of crisis because of its 2020 defeat. At the time of writing this thesis, it is hard to determine what campaign platform Trump would use to compete in the 2024 Presidential election. Hence, to answer these questions, more evidence is needed. The proposed framework provides a framework to shed some light on the progression of the existing populist movement in the United States.

REFERENCE

- Aberhart, William (1935). Social Credit Manual: Social Credit as Applied to the Province of Alberta. pp. 19-21 Saskatchewan Archives at Saskatoon.
- Aslanidis, P. (2017). *Populism and social movements* (C. R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P.O.Espejo,& P. Ostiguy, Eds.; Vol. 1). Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.23>
- Barone, G., & Kreuter, H. (2021). Low-wage import competition and populist backlash: The case of Italy. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 67, 101970.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2020.101970>
- Berman, S. (2021). The causes of populism in the west. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24(1), 71–88. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102503>
- Bureau of the Census Library (1975). *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*. P.127 (Series D11-25).
<https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/histstats-colonial-1970.pdf>
- Canovan, M. (1981). *Populism* (1st ed). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Canovan, M. (2005). *The people*. Polity.
- Causes of Depression in Agriculture and Industry: A Symposium of Opinions. (1922, March 1). *The U.F.A*, p. 9.
<http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/UFA/1922/03/01/9/>
- Chen, S. (2020). *Unemployment, immigration, and populism: Evidence from two quasi-natural experiments in the united states* (SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 3692784). Social Science Research Network.
<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3692784>
- Coe, V. F. (1938). Dated stamp scrip in alberta. *The Canadian Journal of Economics and*

- Political Science / Revue Canadienne d'Economie et de Science Politique*, 4(1), 60–91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/136755>
- Conway, J. F. (1978). *To Seek a Goodly Heritage: The Prairie Populist Resistance to the National Policy in Canada* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation Simon Fraser University).
- Diani, M. (1996). Linking mobilization frames and political opportunities: Insights from regional populism in Italy. *American Sociological Review*, 61(6), 1053. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2096308>
- Dominion Bureau of Statistic. (1951, May). *Handbook of Agricultural Statistics*. D.B.S. REFERENCE PAPER. https://publications.gc.ca/site/archivée-archived.html?url=https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2019/statcan/CS21-501-1951-eng.pdf
- Douglas, Clifford Hugh. (1920). *Credit Power and Democracy*.
 ——— (1924). *Social Credit*.
- Downs, A. (1957). An economic theory of political action in a democracy. *Journal of Political Economy*, 65(2), 135–150. <https://doi.org/10.1086/257897>
- Elkins, D. J., & Simeon, R. (Eds.). (1980). *Small worlds: Provinces and parties in Canadian political life*. Methuen Publications.
- Finkel, A. (1984). Populism and the proletariat: Social credit and the alberta working class. *Studies in Political Economy*, 13(1), 109–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19187033.1984.11675643>
- Finkel, A. (1989). *The Social Credit Phenomenon*. University of Toronto Press. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442682382>

- Foster, Franklin. (2004). "John E. Brownlee". In Bradford J. Rennie (ed.). *Alberta Premiers of the Twentieth Century*. Regina, Saskatchewan: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina.
- Gardiner, Robert (1931, November 16th). Towards the Co-operative Commonwealth. *The U.F.A.* pp. 1-2. <https://archive.org/details/theufav10n22ufoa/mode/2up>
- Grain Grower's Guide (1921, December, 28).
- Gidron, N., & Bonikowski, B. (2013). Varieties of populism: Literature review and research agenda. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2459387>
- Goodwyn, L. (1981). *The populist moment: A short history of the agrarian revolt in America*(Reprint). Oxford Univ. Pr.
- Hawkins, K. A., Carlin, R. E., Littvay, L., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (Eds.). (2019). *The ideational approach to populism: Concept, theory, and analysis*. Routledge.
- Hickman, C. A. (1952). *Agricultural discontent in the middle west, 1900-1939*. Theodore Saloutos , John D. Hicks. *Journal of Political Economy*, 60(2), 174–175. <https://doi.org/10.1086/257194>
- Hicks, J. D. (1981). *The populist revolt: A history of the farmers' alliance and the people's party*. Greenwood Press.
- Irvine, W. (1976). *The farmers in politics*. McGill-Queen's University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zt28n>
- Irving, J. A. (1959). *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta*. University of Toronto Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt1vxmcy7>
- Jansen, R. S. (2011). Populist mobilization: A new theoretical approach to populism. *Sociological Theory*, 29(2), 75–96.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2011.01388.x>

- Jones, David C. (2004). "Herbert W. Greenfield". In Bradford J. Rennie (ed.). *Alberta Premiers of the Twentieth Century*. Regina, Saskatchewan: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina.
- Karol, D. (2009). *Party position change in American politics: Coalition management*. Cambridge University Press.
- Laclau, E. (2005a). *On populist reason*. Verso.
- Laclau, E. (2005b). "Populism: what's in a name?," in F. Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. London: Verso, 32–49.
- Laycock, D. H. (1990). *Populism and democratic thought in the Canadian prairies, 1910 to 1945*. University of Toronto Press.
- Levitsky, S. and J. Loxton (2012). "Populism and competitive authoritarianism: the case of Fujimori's Peru," in C. Mudde and C. Rovira Kaltwasser (eds), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 160–81.
- Lipset, S. M. (1950). *Agrarian socialism: The cooperative commonwealth federation in Saskatchewan; a study in political sociology* (Rev. and expand. ed). Univ. of Calif. Pr.
- Lipset, S. M. (1983). Radicalism or reformism: The sources of working-class politics. *American Political Science Review*, 77(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1956008>
- MacMath, R. C. (1999). *American populism: A social history, 1877 - 1898* (6. print). Hill and Wang.
- Macpherson, C. B. (1962). *Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System*.

- University of Toronto Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt2ttjk1>
- McMath, R. C. (1995). Populism in Two Countries: Agrarian Protest in the Great Plains and Prairie Provinces. *Agricultural History*, 69(4), 517–546. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3744429>
- Mudde, C. (2004). The populist zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, 39(4), 541–563. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x>
- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. (2012). Populism and (liberal) democracy:: A framework for analysis. In C. Mudde & C. Rovira Kaltwasser (Eds.), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* (pp. 1-26). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139152365.002
- Murray, J. M. (1922, March 1). Immediate Reduction of Freight Rates Vital to Agriculture. *The U.F.A*, p. 4. <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/UFA/1922/03/01/4/>
- Naoi, M. (2020). Survey experiments in international political economy: What we (Don't) know about the backlash against globalization. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 23(1), 333–356. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050317-063806>
- Ostler, J. (1992). Why the populist party was strong in kansas and nebraska but weak in iowa *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 23(4), 451. <https://doi.org/10.2307/970302>
- Panizza, F. (Ed.). (2005). *Populism and the mirror of democracy*. Verso.
- Patton, H. S. (1930). The canadian grain pool. *Pacific Affairs*, 3(2), 165–180. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2750145>
- Pollack, N. (1976). *The populist response to industrial America: Midwestern populist thought* (2nd printing). Harvard Univ. Press.

- Rennie, B. J. (2000). *The rise of agrarian democracy: The united farmers and farm women of alberta, 1909-1921*. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442682207>
- Rennie, B. J. & University of Regina (Eds.). (2004). *Alberta premiers of the twentieth century*. Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina.
- Rodrik, D. (2021). Why does globalization fuel populism? Economics, culture, and the rise of right-wing populism. *Annual Review of Economics*, 13(1), 133–170.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-070220-032416>
- Rolph, William Kirby. (1950). *Henry Wise Wood of Alberta*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
<https://archive.org/details/henrywisewoodofa0000rolp/page/n5/mode/2up>
- Sinclair, P. R. (1975). Class structure and populist protest: The case of western canada. *Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie*, 1(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3340007>
- Sharp, P. F. (1948). *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing American Parallels* (NED-New edition). University of Minnesota Press.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttv3d9>
- Smith, W. N. (1932, February 1). Goal of the U.F.A Movement Defined by Annual Convention. *The U.F.A*, p.7. <https://archive.org/details/theufav11n3ufoa/page/6/mode/2up>
- Social Credit Chronicle (1934, September 21).
- Taggart, P. A. (2000). *Populism*. Open University Press.
- Thomas, L. G. (1959). *The liberal party in alberta: A history of politics in the province of alberta 1905–1921*. University of Toronto Press.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctvcj2nfq>

- Urbinati, N. (1998). Democracy and populism. *Constellations*, 5(1), 110–124. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00080>
- Wood, J.W. (1921, October 7). Neither Farmers Nor Labor Can Break into the Plutocratic Classes. *The U.F.A.*
- Wood, J. W. (1922, March 1). The Significance of Democratic Group Organization. *The U.F.A.*, p. 5. <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/UFA/1922/03/01/5/>
- Wood, J. W. (1922, April 1 and 15). The Significance of Democratic Group Organization. *The U.F.A.*, p. 5. <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/UFA/1922/04/01/5/>
- Woodward, C. V. (1938). *Tom watson*. Pickle Partners Publishing.
- Worsley, P. (1969). 'The Concept of Populism', in G. Ionescu and E. Gellner, eds., *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, London, pp. 212—21.
- Young, W. D. (1969). *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF 1932–61*. University of Toronto Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctvfrxn2q>