The Impact of Mass Media on Vote Structure and Party Politics in U.S. Elections in the Framework of Trump's Populism

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Abstract: The 2024 presidential election is just around the corner, and Trump, who has recently gained leading polling support and is himself a political leader with populist traits, represents the current change in the thinking of the American public. The main focus of this paper is on the impact of Trump's mass media propaganda strategy on the vote structure of the U.S. presidential election, as well as on the party system. In the past research, only for the vote structure and media propaganda research, did not put these contents in the populist research paradigm to analyze, but this paper will be a combination of mass media and populist theory and discuss the interests of the two parties in the United States of the change of demand and the change of the representative class.

Keywords: populism, mass media, Donald Trump, U.S. election

1. Introduction

Populism has continued to rise on the North American continent since Trump came to power in 2016, and Trump, the leader of the current opposition Republican Party, is capitalizing on this phenomenon by constantly campaigning for his 2024 election and has already garnered a large amount of support to become the next President of the United States in all likelihood.

In the judgment of populism, anti-liberalism is the most fundamental characteristic of populism, and it is the list of social problems caused by liberalism that gave birth to populism. In the populists' conception, collectivism is higher than individualism, and the concept of "collective" is inviolable. Therefore, the individualism promoted by liberals has already constituted a threat to the collective from their perspectives.

In the current American society, the new media with social attributes have obviously strengthened the concept of "collective". In the past, the collective concept of the "voter" was not strong. The birth of new media has broken this constraint, and voters can easily express their opinions on social media. Once a voter's views are recognized by the majority of people or spark a heated debate, the candidate team will not avoid responding to these views. As a result, the notion of the collective "voter" is reinforced, and the expansion of this collective makes it more and more powerful in shaping the vote.

This paper examines and discusses the current rise of populism in the United States. Firstly, in the introduction, the phenomenon of the increasing importance of mass media in the US election is

proposed, then the mass media propaganda strategy used by Trump on a large scale in the 2016 US election is explained, as well as the structural change of votes before and after the use of such a strategy, and finally the far-reaching impact of Trump's populist political behavior on the US political party system is analyzed in the theoretical framework of populism.

2. Structural Changes in Voters

In the 2016 U.S. election, Trump capitalized on the wave of populism that was becoming more and more evident in the U.S. to garner more votes for himself, and because of this, the composition of the U.S. election vote changed considerably over the course of the year. Populists see themselves as representing the politics of simplicity and directness, and this structural change in the vote is ample evidence of this [1].

2.1. Vote Composition in Past U.S. Elections

Since the end of World War II, the blue-collar worker vote, which represents the political leanings of the lower-middle class in the United States, has seen a marked change in tendency. In a survey on the subject, American scholar Paul R Abramson found that the Democratic Party reaped the lion's share of the blue-collar worker vote, a figure that had once been as high as 80% in 1948 and 1946. American scholars Micheal Hout and others have suggested that since 1968, the voting propensities of blue-collar workers began to to become blurred and no longer clearly fall in favor of the Democratic Party [2, 3]. At the same time, Professor Diao Daming's survey also shows that in the early 1980s, blue-collar workers clearly favored the Republican candidate Reagan, and then returned to the Democratic Party in the two general elections of 1992 and 2008 [4]. It can be seen that the blue-collar workers in the United States are no longer the iron vote bank of the Democratic Party, but have a certain swing space.

While the votes of the upper social elites are entirely based on the interest groups they represent, benefiting from the traditional industries will be more inclined to choose the Republican Party, and the entertainment industry and high-tech industry practitioners will vote for the Democratic Party, which has always shown a certain degree of disorder.

Therefore, from the perspective of social class, in the recent U.S. election, both the elite and the lower-middle class of the society are roughly similar in structure; that is, the vote shares of the two parties in the different classes are roughly the same as the distribution ratio of the final electoral votes. This means that the support rates of the two parties are similar in all social strata, and that whichever party comes to power can represent the interests of a considerable portion of the people in any one of these strata, which determines that the political base of the ruling party is stable and that the series of policies it formulates can be implemented smoothly in every social stratum.

2.2. Changes in the Sources of Bipartisan Votes

At the time of the 2016 U.S. election, 88% of Trump supporters were white, with 63% having less than a high school education, and 83% of Trump supporters lived in remote areas such as suburbs. In addition, Trump was 32 percentage points ahead of Hillary in the white group without college degrees in the decisive key area of Pennsylvania [5]. It can be seen that, with the help of the mass media, the votes and support of the middle and lower classes of society, as the "silent majority", have in fact become an important force in shaping the overall election, and either candidate has to strive for support in this regard.

However, the "neo-liberalism" promoted by the Democratic Party has already caused problems to the lives of the middle and lower classes in the United States, so the general public in the United States are more inclined to conservatism, and the Republican Party is a right-wing political party, and

Trump is an ultra-conservative leader, so naturally, he gained a large number of support from the middle and lower classes in society. support. The Democratic Party, on the other hand, wants to get more votes, it has to win the support of the social elite class, which has led to a fundamental change in the source of the votes of the two parties. As mentioned before, before 2016, the support of the elite class of the United States for the two parties was generally balanced, but since 2016, the upper class of the society is clearly biased in favor of the Democrats, and the middle and lower classes of the society are all biased in favor of the Republican Party, which has directly led to structural changes in the votes for both parties.

2.3. Involvement of the Mass Media in Electoral Sensitization

After the mass media became more involved in the U.S. election, the "silent majority," the middle and lower classes, had a certain role in guiding public opinion, and because the mass media can reach a much larger group than the traditional paper media and television broadcasts, the presidential candidates who dominate the mass media will also receive more public support. In the traditional media, such as television and newspapers, the presidential candidates who dominate the mass media will receive more public support. In traditional media, such as television and newspapers, users are almost completely isolated from each other, and there is only one-sided information output from the media. Therefore, in essence, the traditional media is the mouthpiece of the elites to the middle and lower classes of the society, and the middle and lower classes of the society do not have the opportunity to express their political stance and interests in such new media. But in emerging media like Facebook, communication between users dominates, and the lower and middle classes can easily express their own views, and even look for others who think like them to form their own political communities of interest, which makes the mass media a gathering place for populists.

After Trump announced his candidacy for the 2016 U.S. presidential election, only the New York Observer, the National Enquirer, the New York Post, and another California tabloid declared their support at the primary stage, while on the contrary, the Democratic candidate, Hillary, clearly gained more support, and in addition to the veteran Democrat media outlet, the New York Times, there are many media outlets, such as the Dallas Morning News, who have broken the centuries-long The Dallas Morning News also broke the century-old tradition of not standing for any candidate and publicly announced its support for Democratic candidate Hillary, and even some editorial board members of the Wall Street Journal, which has always been supportive of the Republican Party in the past and has a clear tendency toward conservatism, also turned to the Democratic Party and called on its readers to vote for Hillary. This is still only the traditional paper media; on television, the Democratic Party's voice is even higher, almost completely without the Republican Party and Trump's living space. Although it is true that the Democratic Party has always controlled the major television media, the complete absence of any Republican voice is still very rare. In such a situation, Trump urgently needs to find a media platform that can publicize himself, so the new media, which is more social-oriented, has been valued.

In the traditional paper and television media, the Republican Party and Trump have almost no room to survive, but in the new media, Trump is strongly supported. In the 2016 primary election, Trump's Facebook followers were 15.36 million and 15.9 million on Twitter, in contrast to Hillary's just 9.6 million Facebook followers and 11.3 million Twitter followers. Considering the size of the U.S. population, the difference of millions of followers is enough to reflect the gap in support between the two on social media. In terms of spending on new media, although spending on campaign-type political advertising in the United States was 9.8 billion in 2016, a small increase from 9.4 billion in 2012, the composition of this cost is very different. Spending on traditional media such as television, newspapers, radio, and other publicity costs decreased by 1.3 billion, while social media scoring spending increased by 1.7 billion, and Trump contributed the most to this increase [6]. And of these,

Trump's contribution was again the largest. It can be seen that Trump has invested a lot in the new media, and the new media is more focused on social attributes, so that voters have an obvious sense of participation in the U.S. election and domestic politics, which completely inspired the people's enthusiasm for the election of Trump.

The new mass media has entered the process of the U.S. presidential election on a large scale, for the partisan candidates, can directly contact the lower and middle classes of society, a better understanding of the interests of the general public's needs, and for the lower and middle classes of society, the mass media provides a platform to express their support for the presidential candidates, which indirectly helps the leaders to publicize. Trump as a clear populist characteristics of the leader, obviously more respected by the general public, so the mass media for the Republican Party to bring a large number of votes from the lower and middle classes of society, and relatively, the elite class is more and more biased in favor of supporting the Democratic Party.

3.   Increased Bipartisan Divisions

Lin Hong believes that populism has both anti-establishment and non-anti-political characteristics, which is also clearly expressed in the current U.S. political ecology, non-anti-political in that even though the wave of populism represented by Donald Trump has brought about a huge social impact, there are still no U.S. citizens who would consider that there are problems with the political party system of their own country, and, on the other hand, the anti-establishment in that the two parties that the public supports are already drifting away from one another in terms of representing the class and the interests of the aspirations of the public [7].

3.1.   Changes in Representative Class

Democrats, as liberals, tend to place themselves on a higher pedestal in their criticism of the populace; therefore, liberal politics will eventually and inevitably lead to elitism, and with elitism continually emphasized, populism will inevitably emerge, and elitism is in fact the latent logic of populism. This aristocratic tendency of rhetoric detached from the people is bound to be resented by the lower and middle classes of society, and anti-elite populist ideas emerge [8]. At the same time, populists believe that politics should be "civilianized" and "simplified", and do not believe in black-box operations, behind-the-scenes compromises, or complicated procedures, nor do they approve of technical details that are only understood by experts; they believe that politics should reflect the wisdom of ordinary people [9, 10]. Such a view is clearly more in line with the expectations of the lower and middle classes of society and is in complete contradiction to the liberal political philosophy of the Democratic Party. Therefore, if the Democratic Party wants to gain more votes, it can only work on gaining more support from the upper elites of society, which in turn leads to a continuous rise in the class represented by the Democratic Party.

While the class represented by the Democratic Party was rising, the class represented by the Republican Party was tilting towards the lower and middle classes. With the continuous development of media technology, the vast majority of people could have access to political topics, which objectively led to the civilianization of politics and laid the foundation for the development of populist ideology. After the civilianization of politics, more people from the middle and lower classes of society participated in political activities, and the U.S. election was almost universal, which led to these civilians with anti-elite and anti-intellectualism tendency would decide the presidential candidate to a large extent. Under the combined effect of political plebeianism, anti-liberalism and anti-elite, populist ideology has arisen, and populists tend to be more inclined to support conservatism, so the Republican Party has become the object of support for the lower and middle classes of society. And in the current neoliberalism promoted by the Democratic Party, whether it is gender political

correctness, racial issues or drug issues, they have already caused significant harm to the lives of the lower and middle classes, so the general public will be more inclined to oppose the Democratic Party, which represents the interests of the elites. In addition, the Republican Party itself, in order to gain more votes, is bound to fight for more interests for the lower and middle classes of society, which are larger in absolute numbers, and with the combined effect of both parties, the class represented by the Republican Party keeps sinking.

3.2. Shift in Interests

Before the current wave of populism, both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party were pursuing U.S. hegemony on a global scale, highlighted by the desire to increase their military presence in the Middle East and East Asia, with a view to achieving global control. But from the current point of view, the Democratic Party represented by the Biden administration is still seeking control over the whole world, both in the Middle East and Asia, have carried out active interventions, but the Republican Party represented by Donald Trump has appeared to be a major shift in the interests of the demands of the ruling ideology, often at the expense of the right to control the outside world, in exchange for the opportunity for development at home. As Trump mentioned in his inaugural speech, every decision on trade, diplomacy, and other agendas will have the interests of American workers and families at its core [11]. It is clear that the interests of the Republican Party have shifted to "America First" ultra-conservatism.

For the general public, maintaining the U.S. military presence around the world can only provide a certain sense of pride, but the loss of jobs and economic development opportunities for this purpose has a real impact on daily life, so the middle and lower classes in the U.S. would prefer the government to directly improve their own living environment than to spend a lot of money to control the world. In such a situation, Trump clearly recognized that in order to maintain U.S. influence and pay the price has been unacceptable, therefore, it is necessary to completely give up unnecessary overseas influence, only to retain the matter of U.S. core interests of the global armed, diplomacy to take isolationism, to the core of absolute egoism in exchange for the development of the United States. From a political perspective, Trump's refusal to take on all superpower responsibilities and obligations means giving up almost all diplomatic support in exchange for more resources, all of which had been used in the past for matters unrelated to U.S. interests. From an economic point of view, the essence of trade barriers is a kind of local protectionism, and the trade war is the highest embodiment of local protectionism, that is, complete exclusion, Trump launched a trade war, the fundamental purpose of the trade war is to pass the customs suppression of foreign-related enterprises, in the foreign-related enterprises are tired to cope with the survival of the time, to the national power to help the domestic enterprises, with a view to the end of the trade war in the hope that the formation of a greater competitive advantage. In summary, the fundamental interests of the two parties have been contradictory, the intensity of the future struggle between the two parties will only continue to climb, it is difficult to reconcile in a short period of time.

4. Conclusion

Due to a series of recent social problems within the United States and the development of the mass media, the voices of political populism and anti-liberalism have been rising, and the populist ideology is gradually taking shape in the United States, which has led to the intensification of the contradictions between the Democrats and Republicans in terms of their representative classes and claims to interests. However, the rise of populism is only one aspect of American society, and there are many other reasons for the change of the current political landscape, such as the economic stagnation caused by the epidemic, the change of international public opinion brought about by the Russian-Ukrainian

conflict, and so on, and it is hoped that more factors can be included in future research. In addition, Trump, the political leader of the populist trend in the United States, has also announced that he will participate in the 2024 U.S. presidential election, and his polling support has been hovering at a high level for a long time, and he has a great possibility of returning to the White House. By then, the impact of populism on U.S. party politics will be even more obvious, and it is expected that the subsequent research can be carried out with this as the center.

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