

Opposition in Four Directions

—The Fragmentation and Polarization of Today's American Democratic Politics

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Abstract: With Donald Trump's defeat in the presidential election, America's right-wing populist and non-establishment political leader lost his former glory and was replaced by Joe Biden, who supported multiculturalism and the establishment. However, the end of the general election does not mean the end of the conflict and struggle between the four directions of right-wing populism and multiculturalism, non-establishment camp and establishment camp. The opposition in these four directions makes the dilemma of today's American democratic politics clear. The phenomenon of social division and political polarization deserves attention, and the study of the background and impact of the conflict can help analyze the social problems existing in the United States. The struggle between the left and the right and the establishment complexly exists between the two parties, triggering a series of chain reactions such as Hillary's defeat, Trump's political moves and the "Capitol Hill" incident, and further intensifying the intensity of the struggle. Relevant concepts about struggle will be elaborated, the historical factors of struggle will be traced, and its profound and widespread impact on American society will be analyzed.

Keywords: political polarization, multiculturalism, right-wing populism, establishment, non-establishment

1. Introduction

Political polarization is one of the most striking features of American society today. As early as the early 1980s, a few American scholars, represented by Gene Poole and others, observed the polarization of American politics and believed that it was mainly reflected in the polarization of Democratic and Republican members in the political operation of Congress and the polarization at the public level. [1] Values are torn apart, that is, party polarization/elite polarization and social polarization/mass polarization. Before and after the 2016 U.S. election, political issues centered on political polarization became more prominent in American politics. After the controversy over Donald Trump, the problem of political polarization in the United States became more serious during 2020, and the resulting political conflicts continued, and the "Capitol Hill incident" broke out, democratic politics was in turmoil, and democratic order was impacted.

2. Concept Definition and Basic Fact Analysis

"Political polarization" is an important term in Western political science research, which refers to the polarization phenomenon of party politics. Since the 1970s, political polarization has become increasingly severe in the United States as the gap between rich and poor has intensified. After observing American politics for many years, Francis Fukuyama said in the article "Decline of America—The Roots of Political System Failure" in recent years: "Since the end of the 19th century, the two major political parties in the United States have never been as ideologically aligned as they are today. Polarization. ... The competition between the two parties is becoming increasingly intense." [2]

Niu Xiafei and others believe that multiculturalism has had a strong impact on the mainstream culture of American society, deconstructed and impacted the political consensus of the United States, and even challenged the traditional political and social order of the United States. This is the result of multiculturalism leading to American politics. The underlying causes of polarization. Multiculturalism advocates that all different cultures enjoy equal status and opposes white supremacy and white culture as the center. This has impacted the white-dominated American culture to a certain extent.[3] Multiculturalism requires an equal attitude towards all cultures and does not allow discrimination and other value preferences. However, this value-neutral stance has resulted in the nihilism and relativism of values. Multiculturalists criticize people for treating any non-mainstream culture Neither can be evaluated negatively, and traditional values become blurred. Multiculturalism places more emphasis on the culture and rights of groups, but there is a lack of protection of the rights of specific individuals. Ordinary people are labeled as belonging to a group, but their individual rights are blurred and cannot be fully protected under the coercion of the group. The Democratic Party embraces and promotes the values of multiculturalism.

Right-wing populism is the opposite of multiculturalism. In the United States, its supporters are mainly middle- and lower-class white groups, but it is also supported to varying degrees by other groups. They pay more attention to their own living conditions and oppose elitist political propositions such as multiculturalism, environmentalism, and globalization that are harmful to practical life needs. They demand stable economic income, hope that their self-esteem and traditional family concepts and values will not be violated, and are angry about the threats to their white subject status by minority groups and immigrants, which they call "reverse discrimination." Conservative right-wing ideas are admired by the Republican Party.

The other pair of opposing ideological camps are the establishment and the non-establishment. The establishment is represented not only by Democratic leaders such as Obama, Hillary Clinton and Biden, but also by some Republican leaders. They have received good higher education and have rich political experience and high-quality political experience. They represent the interests of the social elite and advocate elite political ideas such as multiculturalism, globalization, and environmentalism. In terms of leader selection, the establishment believes that only social elites with sufficient political experience can have a dominant voice in politics. Because only the elite can make rational and progressive decisions and lead the way forward for society.

In the face of Obama's eight-year re-election as a member of the establishment, the non-establishment faction emerged. They were worried that the establishment would control the government and take away the democratic rights of ordinary voters and create cartel politics. Instead, they chose to oppose social elites and support political amateurs. Trump and his supporters are representatives of the non-establishment camp. Trump is the richest president in American history. As a real estate tycoon, he has not been in politics for decades like Hillary Clinton. On the contrary, he has not held any public office. As a person outside the system, he opposes the views and policies of the establishment in almost all aspects such as politics, economy, diplomacy, education, people's

livelihood, and national security. He is good at solving existing problems in crude and simple ways and frequently uses social media. The media presents a radical and people-friendly image, using various criticisms of the establishment and drawing clear lines to show that it stands with ordinary voters, thereby gaining support from the middle and lower classes.

3. Analysis of the Current Situation of Ideological Conflict in the United States

3.1. The conflict between multiculturalism and right-wing populism

Scholars such as Niu Xiafei believe that multiculturalism has had a strong impact on the mainstream culture of American society, deconstructed and impacted the political consensus of the United States, and even challenged the traditional political and social order of the United States. [3] This is the reason why multiculturalism has caused the United States to the underlying causes of political polarization. Multiculturalism advocates that all different cultures enjoy equal status and opposes white supremacy and white culture as the center. This has impacted the white-dominated American culture to a certain extent. Multiculturalism requires an equal attitude towards all cultures and does not allow discrimination and other value preferences. However, this value-neutral stance has resulted in the nihilism and relativism of values. Multiculturalists criticize people for treating any non-mainstream culture Neither can be evaluated negatively, and traditional values become blurred. Multiculturalism places more emphasis on the culture and rights of groups, but there is a lack of protection of the rights of specific individuals. Ordinary people are labeled as belonging to a group, but their individual rights are blurred and cannot be fully protected under the coercion of the group.

Multiculturalism has developed the "political correctness" popular in American society today. This political correctness has deviated from the original intention of equality to a certain extent and turned into a reckoning with past discrimination and a pursuit of the culture and values of minority groups. Racial and sexual minorities have gained moral privileges and voice. They have transformed the discrimination and oppression they suffered in the past into current moral advantages, occupying the status of mainstream culture and exerting influence on traditional American culture and social order. constituted an impact. The American people who adhere to the traditional mainstream culture are at a disadvantage in terms of public opinion. This unprecedented situation has caused confusion in people's ideologies and values. The cultural left has excessively tolerated and accepted the culture of minority groups and abandoned traditional behavioral patterns, triggering the problem of "acclimatization".

Right-wing populists are mainly composed of conservative white groups. They adopt a conservative attitude towards all postmodern issues and are hostile to left-wing populists. On the one hand, this is due to the strong impact of emerging ideologies such as multiculturalism on conservative Christian values; on the other hand, it is due to the historical issues left over from the time when Obama and the Democratic Party were in power. The Democratic Party, led by Obama, adopts a tolerant and supportive attitude toward minority groups in order to embody the values of progressive tolerance and gain the support of Democratic voters. Economically, the Democratic Party provides preferential employment policies for minority groups, and culturally supports the voice of multiculturalism and opposes discrimination. This comes at a time when the United States is undergoing economic transformation with industrial relocation and the influx of immigrants. The pressure on employment has made conservatives, who are mainly white people, feel abandoned by the government. The possibility of losing the status of mainstream culture contained in loose assimilation policies has inspired conservatives to defend the psychology and behavior of mainstream culture. [4]

Right-wing populism represents the interests of the middle- and lower-class white groups who have been ignored in the development of American globalization. It is the voice of the general public

that has long been ignored by American political elites. They scorn the so-called "political correctness" and "multiculturalism" , but more concerned about the beliefs and family values followed by ancestors for generations, equal and stable job opportunities, and the respect that white people should receive as the dominant ethnic group in the United States. Although the United States has always been a country with multiple races and cultures, when the right to survival of the white group is impacted by "reverse discrimination," right-wing populism releases the people's long-suppressed unfair sentiments. [5]

Right-wing populists have launched a fierce attack on left-wing ideological trends such as "political correctness", while left-wing populists have also carried out drastic reforms and attacked conservatism. The former believe that the latter is morally corrupt and affects normal economic life, and must be carried out desperately. boycott; the latter thinks that the former is stubborn and conservative, and lashes out with the discrimination they have suffered. [6] The conflict between left and right populism has triggered divisions in today's American society, and also triggered fierce conflicts between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. The two parties are fighting over a large number of postmodern issues, resulting in increasingly irreconcilable political polarization.

3.2. Conflict between the establishment and non-establishment factions

Donald Trump serves as the President of the United States from a political amateur background. An important reason is that his political amateur background itself has a strong anti-establishment flavor. Trump's supporters believe that his opponent Hillary Clinton, as the US Secretary of State and the wife of President Clinton, is a major representative of the establishment forces, and that Hillary's election as president will intensify the postmodern state cartel party's monopoly on democratic politics. status quo and undermines democratic politics. Therefore, Trump's lack of political experience has become an advantage in resisting the establishment. [7]

The President of the United States is the supreme seat within the U.S. government. It is also the key to the competition between the Democratic and Republican parties every four years. From the founding father of the United States, George Washington to the 44th President of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama, the past 43 people in the United States have Among the presidents, 26 are lawyers and belong to the establishment camp. They often graduate from law schools of top universities. They served as state government legislators, mayors, and governors when they were young. They have accumulated rich political experience and connections, and are familiar with the operational logic and rules of the government. Hillary Clinton is undoubtedly a member of the establishment. She is also a lawyer. She served as President Clinton's first lady and was later appointed as Secretary of State by Obama. She is one of the spokespersons of the United States in the international community. Among women, He is also one of the most successful people. Like Hillary, most politicians have formulated a series of rules and systems for American democratic politics, and plan and guide the country's development and future within the government.

However, when the establishment members are within the government, they tend to be too idealistic and disconnected from the masses. In the long run, they will inevitably be distrusted by the middle and lower classes. In this case, the non-establishment faction in the United States represented by Donald Trump It came into being. Trump comes from a business background and had no political experience at all before being elected president. However, he firmly stood with ordinary Americans during the campaign. Under the ideological banner of "Make America Great Again", he proposed a series of measures such as building a US-Mexico border wall, repealing "Obama Care", and ending Obama's moratorium on deportation of immigrants. In the view of the Democratic Party establishment, these governance behaviors not only polarize the problem, but also go against the progressive trends of globalization and diversification. They are both stupid and reactionary; however, these policies strongly respond to the interests and needs of the middle and lower classes, and are consistent with

the needs of the middle and lower classes. This extreme way satisfies the white group's hatred towards minority groups and immigrants. Whether it is Trump's campaign guidelines or specific policies, the middle and lower classes have seen the hope that the United States will return to the "mainstream" and "tradition" that is beneficial to the Christian white group in mainstream culture, foreign policy, social rights and other aspects. Let them feel that their interests and demands are responded to and satisfied by the president. This made Trump, as a non-establishment member, wildly popular among American people.

However, the non-establishment and the establishment can transform into each other. This is also the inherent contradiction of Trump as a non-establishment. The fact that he is a rich man and can become the president of the United States proves that he has always been at a certain distance from the ordinary people, and this distance has further increased after he officially entered the White House: the moment he became president, Trump changed from a non-establishment The transformation of a faction into a member of the establishment faction is not caused by a change in his own views, but by a change in his identity, and this change in identity will also subtly affect his thoughts and behaviors, ultimately making him possess The same characteristics as the establishment. After the COVID-19 outbreak broke out at the end of 2019, faced with an unprecedented emergency, Trump could only do his best to deal with the economic and social problems caused by the large-scale epidemic, and in the process, he "ruled the country on Twitter" The strategy of frequently keeping in touch with the public has turned into a huge loophole of "talking too much will lead to mistakes". Faced with a shortage of masks, the president made remarks in order to ease public panic and said that scarves could replace masks to a certain extent. The result was counterproductive, triggering deep public concerns about the president's ability to respond to the epidemic. In the end, the middle and lower classes had doubts about whether Trump could still solve the difficulties they encountered as a leader of the non-establishment faction, and classified him as another unworldly political elite who was abandoned by the non-establishment faction.

3.3. Complexity of conflict

The conflicts between multiculturalism, right-wing populism, establishment factions and non-establishment factions are complicated. Multiculturalism can be combined with establishment factions and non-establishment factions respectively, and the same is true for right-wing populism. The four camps thus formed are competing fiercely in the United States and are leading political polarization and social division to a more serious situation.

Multiculturalism is often combined with the establishment to form the core of the Democratic Party and appears as a progressive political elite, while right-wing populism is often combined with the non-establishment to form the Republican government led by Trump. However, this does not mean that the Democratic and Republican parties are monolithic. In fact, since Trump was elected president of the United States, the opposition within the Republican Party to Trump has not stopped. The US "Capitol Hill" reported on October 26, 2022 that recently, more and more prominent Republicans have warned that former US President Trump should not run for the election again in 2024, or that if Trump runs If elected, he will lose. These Republicans include Jeb Bush, whose father and brother were former U.S. presidents, as well as former House Speaker Paul Ryan, former Vice President Mike Pence and others. According to reports, this means that after the mid-term elections, the divisions within the American Republican Party may be revealed. [8]

Similarly, there are also divisive conflicts within the Democratic Party. The typical representative is Sanders, who is in the Democratic Party but cares about the lives of the middle and lower classes. Although Sanders has also served as a congressman and has political experience, he does not live in a castle in the air like many establishment parties. On the contrary, he calls himself a "democratic socialist" person. When he participated in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, he stated that he would

change the current situation of serious wealth inequality among Americans, break the unspoken rules of wealth affecting politics, increase tax rates on the rich, promote energy reform in the United States, and combat climate change. He also said that he would not "spend money" in the campaign like most candidates do, nor would he engage in boring wars of words with his opponents in TV ads. He hoped to have serious debates on some major issues related to the national economy and people's livelihood. Sanders is clearly different from the Democratic establishment, which is fashionable in supporting multiculturalism, and has some characteristics of right-wing populism - although he does not have extreme ideas. At the same time, his campaign strategy is obviously opposed to the establishment, and leans towards the non-establishment who are pro-people and pragmatic. [9]

The non-establishment often exploits the masses' fear of cartel parties and the loss of real democratic rights to attract votes, while the establishment exploits the masses' destructive and irrational dislike of the non-establishment to counter populism. Both parties have spent too much energy on how to recruit voters, which has seriously affected the two parties' thinking on actual ideological conflicts and practical issues. The manipulation of social public opinion and voter psychology by both parties has also plunged the masses and society into division and conflict. amidst fierce ideological conflicts. Different parties are also divided into different camps due to different ideologies. Although this situation is very common in American history, in the context of political polarization, the divisions within the parties have aggravated what people in different camps want to achieve. Obstructed and burdened by their own goals, any faction has to devote a lot of energy to handling public opinion incidents and gaining more votes, which further aggravates the decline in government efficiency and fierce conflicts within society.

4. The impact of ideological conflicts and political polarization in the United States

As the current status quo of American democratic politics, political polarization and ideological conflicts have brought about many social problems, leading to a series of problems such as the weakening of the effectiveness of American democratic elections, low national efficiency, and damage to people's rights and interests. They are the dilemmas of postmodern democratic politics. typical phenomenon.

Political polarization has weakened the effectiveness of democratic elections in the United States, weakened the choice space democratic elections provide for the people, and also weakened the actual democracy of democratic elections. Non-establishment and establishment factions use voter psychology to manipulate votes, rather than using solutions to real social problems as the demarcation point for voters to make choices. As the polarization and opposition between the two parties becomes increasingly serious, they are becoming more extreme, and this tendency to advocate extremes is contrary to the practical proposals for moderation expected by the people. The people can only decide which side they hate more, but it is difficult to choose the side they support. Democratic voters who support Sanders can only choose Biden in order to avoid Trump coming to power. What democratic elections pursue is to select competent leaders. The function will be greatly weakened. [10]

State inefficiency is another manifestation of political polarization. The contradiction between the two parties has become increasingly extreme, which has caused them to oppose each other, undermine each other, destroy each other's political legacy, and turn dialectical absorption of the other party's policy views into total opposition and resistance to the other party. As a result, rationality in Congress has the possibility of considering the value of bills and passing useful bills has been greatly reduced. The country's operational efficiency has been lowered by presidential executive orders that cancel legislation and policies of the previous president and the opposition party, and by a Congress that opposes each other for the sake of opposition.

Ordinary people are the biggest victims of political polarization and ideological conflicts. Multiculturalism has had a strong impact on traditional mainstream values, and it has used public

power and political correctness to force the public to accept it, causing ordinary people to have a strong impact on their value orientation, aesthetic concepts, and self-perception. The views and measures taken by the establishment and multiculturalists on social issues tend to ignore the rights and interests of middle- and lower-class whites, causing them to suffer setbacks in their social status, face more pressure on job opportunities, and struggle with family issues and religious concepts. receive a blow. Although the radical measures taken by non-establishment parties and right-wing populists superficially respond to the needs of the general public, their overly extreme handling methods will instead bring about more historical problems and bring serious consequences to minority groups. The harm caused and the indelible historical memory have laid the foundation for more intensified social conflicts in the future.

5. Conclusion

In short, today's American society is already in the struggle between the four major ideologies mentioned in this article. Social ideological trends and ideological divisions have deepened, political polarization and conflicts between political factions have intensified, and various explicit and invisible social problems have emerged. If the conflict between multiculturalism and right-wing populism is the fork in the road of cultural development in the 21st century, then the contradiction between the establishment and the non-establishment is a different choice for the evolution of democratic politics in the next era. The study of the divisive conflicts of the "four directions" in the United States can't only understand the profound contradiction between tradition and progress in postmodern society and make expectations for the evolution of social values, but also deepen the understanding of the evolutionary trends of Western democratic politics, and help further Study the causes and connotations of the contradictions between the government and the people, elites and the masses in the 21st century.

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