Research on the "Representational Break" of Political Parties in the Background of the Rise of Contemporary Western Populism

Xiaoyi Lu(✉)

Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan, China
415923624@qq.com

Abstract. The rise of populism in the West is the result of the "representational fracture" of political parties. Based on the analytical perspective of party politics, the nationalization of political parties is an important reason for the crisis of representation in the democratic system. Due to the shrinking of the representative function of mainstream political parties, it has transformed from an open representative organization to a closed ruling organization, which has led to the rise of populist parties. Populists seek to restore the subjectivity of the people, bridging the representation gap between the state and society by reducing the distance between citizens and the policy process and increasing the channels of communication between citizens and elites. Although it challenges mainstream political parties and democratic models and expands the channels of political representation, at this stage it is still necessary to follow the logic of electoral politics for institutional construction, which has certain limitations.

Keywords: Populism · Representation · Nationalization of Political Parties · Five Star Movement · National Front

1 Introduction

After World War II, discussions in Western countries mainly focused on social issues such as economic growth, post-war reconstruction, employment, and welfare policies. At this time, the mainstream political parties had a clear class foundation, competed for leadership, and each expressed the interests and demands of different social groups, becoming "a medium for the democratization of class struggle." After the Cold War, with the rise of neoliberalism and in the context of economic globalization, issues such as immigration and identity have gradually become prominent. In order to retain the votes of the middle group, mainstream political parties chose not to respond effectively to this, and their support rate in the electoral market continued to decline. Populist parties have risen by focusing on and responding to these issues and have challenged traditional mainstream parties by questioning their representation, thereby triggering a crisis of government legitimacy [1].

Political Analysis Report published by the Political Life Research Center of Sciences Po, from the survey results of the French people's views on political parties and political

elites, the people and elites are in a state of opposition to a certain extent. As high as 89% of the people do not represent the public, while about 75% of the public believe that the political elites are corrupt and inaction, and as high as 78% distrust and dislike political figures and political elites [2].

The practical form of modern national democratic politics is mainly represented by representative politics, and party politics is the main component of representative democracy. The emergence of modern political parties is to transmit various demands to the public sphere, "representing the people by expressing their demands", and its main function is to coordinate the relationship between interest expression and policy integration, and to construct a broad representation. In theory, within the framework of a representative democracy, political parties can well link popular votes with elite rule: for the votes of their citizens, parties make commitments to the people and respond to voter initiatives and demands, to exercise state power on their behalf. With the coordinating role of political parties, representative democracy logically shapes the interdependence between the state and society, and promotes political cooperation between elites and the masses.

However, in the actual operation, in order to maximize votes, mainstream political parties tend to formulate a campaign platform that is consistent with each other based on the preferences of intermediate voters; on major social issues that voters pay attention to, such as immigration, identity and other topics, mainstream political parties Political parties tend to give vague answers or make no comments in order not to lose the votes of the median voter. This makes it difficult for citizens to choose a political party that truly represents their opinions by comparing the principles and policies of political parties. The final result is that "the competition in the election does not guarantee the pros and cons of the outcome, it can only guarantee the democratic character of the outcome.". At this time, the representative function of the political party was weakened, and the distance between the political party and the citizens was widened. The political party was separated from the control of the citizens but legally held the state power. The alienation of the representative function of mainstream political parties pushes ordinary citizens to the opposite side of the power elite, triggers questions about the crisis of government legitimacy, and thus provides the soil for the rise of populism.

2   The Causes of Political Party "Representational Break"

Political parties are intermediary organizations that connect the relationship between the state and society. The nationalization of political parties formed by separating from society and integrating into the state makes their representative function of expressing and integrating social demands shrinking.. Nationalization of political parties means that "political parties are increasingly subordinated to the logic of the state, and not only their functions but also their organizational forms are gradually isomorphic with the state, thus losing the characteristics of political parties as political organizations and political movements". As far as political parties are concerned, the "representational fracture" is concentrated in that, on the one hand, political parties transcend the previous class category and claim to be universally representative. On the other hand, it is more alienated from the masses, especially the masses at the bottom, which is manifested in

the fact that in contemporary party politics, it is difficult to find the kind of political movements with clear goals in the 19th century or the first half of the 20th century. The blurring of the boundaries between political parties and countries makes the two tend to be isomorphic, and the result is precisely the loss of political representation.

The author believes that there are two reasons for the nationalization of political parties [3]. On the one hand, although mainstream political parties have different policy choices and ideological inclinations, they have gradually separated from the lower-level citizens and become part of the state ruling apparatus. They have become more and more homogeneous with each other in terms of their lack of representative capacity. On the other hand, since the 21st century, the social groups and their political demands in Western countries have become more and more heterogeneous, and people need corresponding channels of representation. In the dislocation between the homogeneity of mainstream political parties and the heterogeneity of social structure, the situation of political representation continues to deteriorate, and the phenomenon of "party representation rupture" occurs, and populist political parties also gain space for growth.

From the perspective of the functions of political parties, as the link between society and the state, political parties are both the "representatives" of the people and the "rulers" of the people. The representative function is embodied in the political party's in-depth social mobilization of voters and the integration of their political preferences into public policies; the ruling function is embodied in the political party's competition according to the electoral procedure to ensure the peaceful transfer of leadership. However, in contemporary Western countries, because part of the decision-making power has been transferred to non-partisan committees and other institutions, and citizens express their interests through online channels, the representative function of mainstream political parties has been weakened. Political parties mainly play the ruling function of transporting elites, organizing the government and assigning positions. As the political party is alienated from society and close to the state, it has gradually changed from a "representative organization" to a "governing body". Although political party competition has changed leadership and formed a legitimate government in the electoral process, its function of representing public opinion has been greatly weakened.

The adverse effects of the nationalization of political parties are mainly manifested in the narrowing of citizens' choices and the exclusion of public opinion, which leads to the seriousness of the fracture of party representation.

2.1   Party Nationalization Leads to the Convergence of Party Policy Platforms and Narrows the Choices Available to Citizens

Before the emergence of party nationalization, mass-type parties had a relatively stable class base and could effectively mobilize voters through ideology. After the emergence of party nationalization, citizens no longer vote strictly according to ideological boundaries due to the rise of the new middle class and the weakening of party identity. At the same time, in order to reduce the risk of losing elections, mainstream political parties are reluctant to intervene in disputes involving cultural conflicts and identity. Mainstream parties tend to move closer to the median electorate and formulate policy platforms with convergent features. This phenomenon of convergence reflects the rationality of parties, but it blurs the boundaries between parties and narrows the choices of citizens.

2.2 Political Party Nationalization Will Form a Party System that Excludes the Expression of Public Opinion

Although there is competition among mainstream parties, they share a common interest in monopolizing leadership and dividing the country's resources, and they try to guard against the emergence of other challenging parties. For example, in Austria, which implements a parliamentary system, the People's Party and the Social Democratic Party have repeatedly formed a coalition government where the left and the right are jointly governing, "isolating and containing the challenges of the opposition parties". Under the circumstance that the above-mentioned political party system tends to be closed, the relationship between the mainstream political party and the people has changed from the original relationship of representation and being represented to the relationship of exclusion and exclusion. Social members who suffer from political exclusion become potential mobilization targets of populist parties.

3 Reconstruction of the Fracture of Party Representation by Western Populism

Once the goal of populists shifts from expressing social protest to controlling the policy agenda, they do not have a systematic and complete policy framework to deliver on their promises, and are equally subject to the norms of the electoral system. Therefore, the populist challenge in Western countries has not broken through the framework of the constitutional system, but it has had an important impact on the reconstruction of political representation. It is manifested in the following two points:

3.1 Populism's Reconstruction of the Fractured Representation of Political Parties is Manifested in the Approach of the Political Distance Between the People and the State, and the Simplification of Political Phenomena and Strategies Induces Public Participation

In order to effectively cope with the pressure of public affairs, Western countries gradually established professional management institutions to give full play to the advantages of expert governance. These non-elected functional organizations implement a problem-oriented rather than public opinion-centered operation model, pursue the principle of efficiency first, and do not bear the responsibility of direct response to citizens, so that citizens can express their opinions on social focus issues. Channels been squeezed. As a result, the Western democratic system has the characteristics of "depoliticization". Various topics with political attributes are transformed into issues of governance technology, and the barriers of professional knowledge exclude the public from the policy process [4].

Populism tries to bring politics back to the people. Bringing politics back to the people is not just about changing the elite power structure, but also adapting to popular cognitive requirements. In response to the conflict between elite rule and popular cognition, populists advocate "negative discourse mobilization" and "simplistic politics", reconstructing the subject image of democratic politics and its applicable rules. They

oppose pluralistic society and believe that the will of the community can be presented through the rule of majority; they oppose the intermediary mechanism, and advocate the simplicity and directness of political decision-making.

The National Front, a populist political party in France, claims that it is the spokesperson for the political demands of the people and the defender of the interests of the "silent majority". Immigrants and political elites seek their own special interests, and the representative political system actually hinders them., cut off the link between the "real people" and power, and only the direct participation of citizens in decision-making can be free from the political manipulation of the power elite. Its often used demagoguery is "us" and "you," "the people" and "politicians," to incite voter dissatisfaction with the political establishment. The concepts of "we" and "people" they said completely exclude immigrants and political elites, in order to incite the French people's hatred of immigrants, and thus build a similar triangular political relationship: on the one hand, political The elite political class is said to be the "prime enemy", while the people are portrayed as innocent victims, while the National Front, which is in between, claims to be the hero who saves the people. The political propositions of populists embody a simplistic style adapted to the psychological characteristics of the masses.

3.2   Populism's Reconstruction of the Fractured Representation of Political Parties Increases the Communication Channels Between Elites and the Public, Advocates Direct Democracy, and Makes Full use of Internet Technology

With the development of communication technology, especially the emerging network technology, the transition of "political mediation" appeared in western countries. The application of new media technology in the field of political communication improves the convenience of political participation and has a significant impact on the representative function of political parties. First of all, populist parties use the Internet to bypass traditional media, such as TV stations, newspapers, radio, etc. to disseminate information. Some controversial information that cannot be disseminated by traditional media can be disseminated on the Internet. Second, new media technologies enable citizens to interact directly with political elites outside of the regular electoral process or party channels. "The channel of political communication affects the nature of the representative relationship". As citizens have been empowered by media technology, the representative function once undertaken by political party organizations has been relatively weakened. The realistic choice for members of society is not to passively accept party mobilization, but to take collective action "bypassing the party". Finally, the lack of responsiveness of mainstream parties prompts citizens to seek alternative means of political representation, which presents an opportunity for populist challengers who use media technology for voter mobilization. Populist leaders, adapting to the characteristics of social media, tend to use popular language to make strong commitments to citizens and use personification to claim to be true representatives of the national interest. Those social groups that see themselves as ostracized by mainstream parties have attempted to restructure their policy agendas by supporting populist parties.

For example, the populist Five Star Movement in Italy Movement), which was formed on October 4, 2009 by Italian comedians Beppe Grillo and GianRoberto Caseregio. The

Five Star Movement Party does not have a clear political program nor strict organizational discipline. It is a political party in a non-traditional sense. It is good at publicity and activities through street speeches, Facebook and other forms. Its "headquarters" is the website (www.beppegrillo.it), ordinary party members can directly participate in collective decision-making through "Internet democracy", they advocate that citizens should represent their voices without the need for political parties as an intermediary, and the emergence of the Internet will make this change possible. The Five Star Movement requires the public to change from representing democracy to participating in democracy, promoting a green economy, cutting taxes, etc., and its agitation has attracted countless middle- and lower-level people who have long been disappointed with politics. Fabio Bordignon, a professor at the University of Urbino in Italy, pointed out that "the Five Star Movement was born on the Internet, which is a place outside traditional politics", and the combination of online and offline makes it suitable for those who want to participate in politics, but are not interested in traditional political parties. The channel given offers new options for disillusioned young people.

4   Conclusions

The populist challenges facing the West are mainly protesting against the lack of responsiveness of political elites, criticizing the lack of representation of mainstream political parties, and failing to propose a systematic political blueprint. As far as the operating mechanism of democratic politics is concerned, political elites deviate from members of society due to the nationalization of political parties, so the realistic appeal of populism is to restore the dominant position of the people and narrow the distance between citizens and the state. Populists criticize the elitist nature of representative democracy by going back to the original meaning of democracy as the rule of the people, and "challenge democracy in the name of democracy". Liphardt believes that democracies allow various social groups to legitimately express their interests and that populist parties also "have the right to compete and be represented". Thus, populist parties can play a role in representational reconstruction in terms of objective consequences [5].

References

1. Wang Hui. Representational Break and "Post-Party Politics" [J]. Open Times, 2014(02): 70–79+7.
2. Gao Chunya. The crisis of party representation and the rise of populism in Western countries [J]. Political Science Research, 2020(01): 102–111+128.
3. G. Sartori: "Parties and Party Systems", p. 56, Commercial Press, 2006 edition
4. Joe Sartori: "New Theory of Democracy", p. 264, Oriental Press, 1998 edition.
5. Seymour Martin Lipset: "Political Man", p. 204, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1997 edition.