Conservative Divisions within the US Academy: Trumpists versus Conservative Anti-Trumpers

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ABSTRACT

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There has been an outpouring of research on right-wing populist conservatism since the advent of the Trump presidency and right-wing movements in Europe. While considerable attention is being given to the study of conservative movements and right-wing groups, little research thus far has been devoted to divisions among conservatives themselves, and especially among conservative academics. While Trumpism has maintained remarkable unity within the Republican Party for electoral reasons, it has created division among conservative intellectuals and academicians. The Trump era has increased the political polarization not only in American society but also within the academy.

Yet little research attention has thus far been devoted to the divisiveness of Trumpism within the academy. And interesting and important exception is the study by Kidder and Binder (2020) of white conservative college students at four elite universities. These sociologists found evidence of Trumpism to be a divisive factor even among conservative students. These sociologists identified three ideal typical orientations toward Trumpism: true believers, principled rejectors, and satisfied partisans.

This paper expands this line of research to look at the impact of Trumpism on conservative faculty. It identifies two groups: professors who publicly support Trump

and those who publicly oppose him: Trumpists and anti-Trumpers. The paper compares 102 politically conservative professors who are Trumpists and 80 conservative professors who are anti-Trumpers. All 182 function as public intellectuals who advocate their views in social media and beyond. Comparisons look at their respective institutional locations (school prestige, academic discipline, and scholarly productivity) in the field of American higher education.

In addition, the paper examines the network affiliations to major think tanks, government agencies, and other associations where these individuals try to influence the public agenda with their views. The paper addresses the following four questions: 1) What are the institutional field locations of these conservative professors in American higher education? Do they cluster in similar or different types and ranks of institutions? 2) Can one identify connections between their scholarship (academic disciplines and productivity) and their political stances? 3) What kinds of connections external to the academy do these scholars cultivate? Do the two groups affiliate with similar outside groups or different ones? 4) What stances have these two groups taken relative to four of the most important challenges of the Trump era: Covid-19, the impeachments, the November 2020 election lost, and the January 6 mob assault on the US Capitol.

The study draws inspiration from Pierre Bourdieu 's field analysis to answer these questions. As such, it contributes to political sociology, the sociology of intellectuals and of conservative politics in American higher education.

WORKSHOP

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