**Social Capital and Voting Behaviour in the United States**

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**Abstract**

Social capital has traditionally been viewed as a fundamental driver of democratic vitality. However, since the late-20th century, it has been suggested that social capital may also have adverse effects, potentially fostering totalitarian and populist ideologies. This paper examines the political implications of two different types of social capital —bonding social capital and bridging social capital—, using the 2016 and 2020 U.S. presidential elections as a case study. By examining at the county level, we find that the relation between social capital and antisystem voting behaviour is contingent upon the type of social capital involved. Bonding social capital, characterised by close-knit, homogeneous networks, is positively correlated with antisystem behaviours, as proxied by the additional electoral support for Donald Trump. In contrast, bridging social capital, which involves connections across diverse social groups, shows a negative correlation. Furthermore, our analysis reveals a complex interaction between economic and demographic changes, social integration, and political tendencies in a period of economic transition. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of social capital and its critical role in understanding its origins and effects.

**Keywords:** Social capital; geography of discontent; antisystem; territorial inequalities