

# Meiji Institute for Global Affairs

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### **“Political Correctness” in the U.S. Election Campaigns: Impact and Implication**

The U.S., the pioneer of democratic states, is the greatest champion of free speech.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, absolute freedom of speech does not exist. I believe that political correctness has a definite restraining effect upon free speech. Since it began to be used in the U.S. in the 1980s, it has come to refer to activities to eliminate discrimination and prejudice as a whole. Outside the borders of the U.S., “political correctness” has become entrenched as “common sense” among the educated classes of many countries, and serves in particular as a form of soft power for the elimination of discrimination and prejudice in social terminology. Thus, while political correctness has a restraining effect upon free speech, it is valued by many people as a positive force for its correction of a variety of

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<sup>1</sup> The world's first free speech movement is said to have been the student movement that lit the fire of the American student uprisings of the late 1960s.

social ills. However, the nature of political correctness has been criticized as a “cover for lies” by the president-elect of the U.S., Donald Trump.

In an election that gathered global attention, Trump, who has a total lack of experience in state administration, beat Hillary Clinton, who has a lifetime of political activity behind her, with an almost identical number of votes. Does Trump’s victory indicate the decline of “political correctness”? I would like to consider the changes that might occur to the role “political correctness” has been playing in American political and popular culture.

### **Does Trump's victory mean the defeat of “political correctness”?**

When Trump first announced his candidacy within the Republican Party, it would be no overstatement to say that he was entirely unpopular. In the summer of last year, I held a discussion with a group of middle-aged Caucasians, representative of the Republican Party supporting middle class, regarding Trump’s campaign. I was warned against taking Trump seriously, and the group gave the impression of rating his prospects for election poorly. In the subsequent events, contrary to expectations, Trump who continued to ignore political correctness, had gained many supporters and achieved victory in the election.

Trump has undoubtedly made inexcusable comments about women, immigrants, the disabled and Muslims. By doing so, he has aroused significant antipathy among the educated classes, and has been deemed unqualified to serve as president. Many professors at my alma mater, Washington University in St. Louis, have expressed total disgust at Trump over social networks.<sup>2</sup> Their statements echo the voices of many Trump opponents. That is to say, they assert that Trump’s ideas are not only anti-political correctness, but in opposition to the basic American national value that “everyone is born equal”. In their eyes, Trump’s election represents the trampling of the articles of their faith. As a result, it is not easy for them to accept Trump’s unexpected victory. As many of

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<sup>2</sup> The two candidates’ second televised debate was held at this university. These professors have in common that they adopt an attitude of friendliness and equality to foreign students and people of color, and in 2014, when a white police officer shot dead a black youth in an incident that occurred in Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, they were united in their condemnation of the white police officer, and spontaneously joined protests.

them are intellectuals, they feel bound to respect the results of the democratic system that is the cornerstone of national institutions, and are taking a position of compromise, but they are nonetheless the most faithful defenders of “political correctness”.

However, does the victory of Trump really mean the defeat of “political correctness”? Experts in American politics suggested that prior to the current presidential election, the Democratic Party had already been beaten by the Republican Party in the midterms of November 4, 2014, in which Republicans had captured a majority of seats in both houses of Congress.<sup>3</sup> Professor Fumiaki Kubo of the University of Tokyo offers the following four points in a sharp analysis of the causes of the Democratic Party’s loss. 1) The problem of the time lag between economic improvement and the mood of the people; 2) Political stagnation; 3) The unpopularity of the implementation of Obamacare; 4) The rise of ISIS.<sup>4</sup> While further examination is required, the greatest debate in the current presidential election focused exactly on these four points. Speaking from the result, by going into the presidential election without learning from lessons of the midterms, the politically correct Clinton was defeated by the politically incorrect Trump. The conclusion I have reached is that the effect of “political correctness” or “political incorrectness” on election results is extremely limited, and Trump’s victory does not mean the decline of the “political correctness” that has been persistently promoted by the aforementioned educated liberals. Conversely, by overrating the importance of “political correctness”, Democratic Party supporters risk missing an opportunity to consider the problems of the eight year Obama presidency.

### **Appointment of white supremacists and the future of political correctness**

One week after he was chosen as the next president of the U.S., Trump appointed white supremacist Steve Bannon to the senior executive post of chief strategist and senior advisor in the Trump administration. Since he is a representative of the

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<sup>3</sup> For details see, “The election is already over, and Trump will win in a landslide” that reviews the defeat of the Democratic Party in the 2014 midterms, and anticipates a Trump victory. (<http://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2016/08/hillaryclinton-attacks-us-hunters-campaign-rally/>, accessed on November 16, 2016)

<sup>4</sup> For details see, “Evaluation of the 2014 U.S. midterm elections” (<http://www.nhk.or.jp/kaisetsu-blog/400/202970.html>, accessed on November 16, 2016)

anti-multiculturalist, anti-immigrant, white supremacist and anti-feminist alt-right, Bannon, who led Trump to a historic win in a fight with little chance of victory, is by no means popular within the U.S. After serving as Chief Executive Officer in the Trump campaign, his appointment may be not unusual for the new administration, but it was a further shock for the anti-Trump group. In order to achieve policies that are stable and supported by the public, not only Trump, but those he appoints may be forced to compromise to a certain extent in order to work with those around them.

Based on the results of the election, “political correctness”, including values representative of American popular culture such as feminism and multiculturalism, is merely one factor that influences the result of a presidential election. It is my belief that neither Clinton’s loss nor Trump’s victory in any sense indicate the decline of “political correctness”. As the U.S. move into the post-Obama administration<sup>5</sup>, it is likely that “political correctness” will conversely have an even greater effect on the formation of domestic and foreign policy.

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<sup>5</sup> While it is almost certain that the next administration will be the Trump administration, with a campaign by various anti-Trump groups following the election result having gathered 2.4 million signatures urging the electors in the electoral college scheduled for next month not to cast their votes for Trump, and anti-Trump demonstrations occurring in major cities, I have chosen the expression “post-Obama”.