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COVERING THE RISE OF TEA PARTY:
A CASE OF MAINSTREAM MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Devoted to the intersection of media, politics, and social movements, this thesis aims to dissect media discourse through computer-aided content analysis on emotion, time orientation, cognitive process, and psychological drives so that it may uncover how opinion leaders framed and formulated their tone and perspectives on the Tea Party Movement during the 2010 Midterm Election. Adopting the popular text analysis software Linguistic Inquiry and Word Counts (LIWC), the research analyzed opinion articles published in the *New York Times* (NYT) and *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) during the month before and after the election on November 2, 2010. The analyses reconstruct and account for similarities and differences between opinion leaders or columnists working for the NYT and WSJ in terms of their tones and attitudes toward the populist movement. While the election outcome and opinion articles did not differentiate the general tone towards the TPM between the two newspapers, opinion leaders from NYT expressed more anger and sadness than their counterparts at WSJ. The WSJ's opinion pieces expressed more upbeat projections for the future and the TPM than those in NYT. This study fills a gap in the literature by exploring opinion leaders' treatment of populism, whose approaches should also represent the ideological tilts of U.S. mainstream news media. The findings in this study should advance the understanding of the rise and fall of a populist movement in a Western country.

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Introduction

On February 19, 2009, Rick Santelli of CNBC made a rant for a "Chicago Tea Party" after calling for rejection of President Obama's bailout programs (Guardino et al., 2012). The media moment soon became viral and in months a Tea Party Movement (TPM) emerged amid widespread financial instability and unemployment.

Started as an anti-tax movement, the TPM evolved into a conservative political force during the beginning of the Obama presidency. Supported financially and politically by big donors like the Koch Brothers, the TPM embraced a new anti-Obamacare agenda, orchestrated protests across the country, and eventually positioned itself as an electoral force to contest in the 2010 Midterm Election.

Widely recognized as a populist movement, the TPM, like many movements, is described by many as media constructed. First welcomed by the conservative echo chamber and then mainstreamed by the liberal corporate media, the TPM received far more positive coverage from the media than other social movements (Burack & Snyder-Hall, 2012; Meagher, 2012).

The fast growth of the TPM in the United States stimulated fierce debates among not only liberals and conservatives, but also news commentators and columnists who commented on almost every aspect of the movement's political influence. The perspectives from the opinion leaders in turn shaped the direction of various social debates on the topic.

While many studies describe the rise of the TPM as "the right-wing populist amalgam" (Jutel, 2016, p. 1129), it remains unclear how the opinion leaders' attitudes and tones on the TMP expressed in their newspaper columns shifted over time and how the opinion shifts were reflected in the mainstream media discourse.

Literature Review

Many academics have recorded the rise of right-wing populist parties and movements across Europe and within the United States since the late 1980s and 1990s and the role news media played in facilitating the process (Nacos et al., 2003; Mudde, 2004; Boomgaarden & Vilegenthart, 2007; Pierson & Skocpol, 2007; Major, 2012; McGirr, 2015). Right-wing populist parties usually grab public attention by incorporating media-savvy leaders and often controversial rhetoric, projecting themselves into the minds of millions of voters (Bos, 2012; Winneg, 2014).

All social movements tend to and need to receive media attention to thrive (Scheufele 1999; Iyengar 2011). In a broader sense, social and populist movements rely on media coverage to communicate with potential supporters, broaden the conflict of issues and obtain legitimacy (Weaver & Scacco, 2013; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

This is the essential process of *mediatization*. As Swiss scholar Hanspeter Kriesi (2014) noticed in *The Populist Challenge*, "the mediati[z]ation of politics contributes to the shifting balance of party functions by reducing the role of the party apparatus, by linking the party leaders more directly to their voters, by enhancing the personali[z]ation of political leadership, and by fostering the "depolitici[z]ation" of the party base" (p. 365).

In short, mediatization is a process where media influence is exerted upon the subject they are covering (Asp & Esaisson, 1996). Like many populist movements, TPM's rise to the national stage has to be attributed to the intensive media coverage received between 2009 and 2010.

A reactionary populist movement, according to Margaret Canovan (1981) in *Populism*, occurs "in the context of a political culture committed to democratic principles but riven by

cleavages between the progressive culture of the elite and the reactionary instincts of

the populace" (p. 15). That definition, as Burack and Snyder-Hall (2012) and others have pointed

out, manifested what the TPM is all about (Perrin et al., 2014; Woolner, 2010; Parker and

Barreto, 2013).

To make populist movements appeal to the public, Burack and Snyder-Hall (2012) found

that the movements tapped into "the particular social, economic, and political conditions in

which they arise" and depend on "the appearance of charismatic leaders for

their visibility and successes" The latter point has been repeated by research that found media-

savvy leaders have an impact on the electoral success of the movement (e.g., Bos, 2012).

Burack and Snyder-Hall (2012) attributed the TPM's success to its media coverage:

"What characterizes the most recent eruption of populist anger is the omnipresence of the

corporate-owned media and the important role explicitly conservative media voices have played

in actively promoting right-wing populism" (p. 446). That statement pointed out two reasons

why TPM as a media-constructed movement was such a success:

- Led by Fox News, the conservative "echo chamber" fully recognized TPM's populist

  roots and heavily covered the nascent movement from its early days;

- Rather than marginalizing or dismissing the TPM as a protest movement, mainstream

  television networks embraced the rise of the TPM.

"The Echo Chamber"

In the past three decades, America's media landscape has fundamentally changed

(Skocpol & Williamson, 2012). Key events, including the passage of the 1996

Telecommunication Act and the abolition of The Fairness Doctrine by the FCC, pushed

for the "neoliberalization of media policy," providing a "fertile ground" for conservative media

outlets to flourish and expand (Guardino & Snyder, 2012, p. 532-533).

A conservative "echo chamber," noted by Jamieson and Cappella (2008), emerged out of

this media environment where right-wing rhetoric could "both magnify the messages delivered

within it and insulate them from rebuttal" (p. 76). One of the key features for such an "echo

chamber" is that it "creates a common frame of reference and positive feedback loops for those

who listen to, read, and watch these media outlets" (p. 76).

As soon as the TPM's messages converged with its rhetoric, the conservative apparatus

became the staunchest supporter and most reliable platform for the TPM (Dagnes, 2010). Led by

radio host Glenn Beck and Fox News, the TPM messages were quickly disseminated to the

public with ease (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012). The echo chamber's agenda-setting effect

orchestrated the TPM, brought down the barriers between media and movement, and pushed the

movement to a new height.

The Role of News Media

Iyengar and Hahn (2011) found that partisan media reinforce their predispositions in

covering political events like the TPM. Right-wing partisan media, therefore, undertook an

important role in supporting the movement's cause. Although Fox News was not the first to

recognize the TPM's grassroots strength, the network's "assiduous promotional and

informational efforts" made a huge impact in provoking public debates about the issues raised by

TPM. (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012, p. 132) In addition, the network gave the TPM a "special

political meaning" by pronouncing it as "grassroots," "genuine," "organic," "spontaneous," "independent," and "mainstream" (p. 136).

Multiple studies pointed to a kind of "peer pressure" between Fox News and other news outlets, who felt that they under-covered the TPM during the Tax Day Rally (as a series of protests organized by the TPM for promoting anti-tax agenda) and later decided to expand and balance their coverage on the TPM after the summer of 2009 (Boykoff & Laschver, 2011, p. 359).

Guardino and Snyder (2012) found that CNN's coverage did not differ from Fox's, and it also depicted the movement in a favorable light (p. 535). Similar to what Weaver and Scacco (2012) found, Guardino and Snyder contended that the traditional marginalization model no longer held for the TPM, because media refused to dismiss it as a protest movement (p. 537).

This notion is supported by Skocpol and Williamson (2012), who noticed that "the [mainstream] media beyond the conservative echo chamber were a bit slow to leap into the Tea Party story, but once they did, the answers to these questions turned out largely as elite sponsors of the Tea Party wanted" (p. 123-124). They continued to notice that "in early 2009, major outlets not only reported on events as they unfolded; a major sector of the media helped to orchestrate protests and build them into a credible political force" (p. 127).

As Guardino and Snyder pointed out, "despite the corporate media's long-standing tendency to marginalize or denigrate citizen activism, this moment of right-wing populism was mainstreamed" (p. 528).

As the TPM developed its influence as an electoral bloc, Skocpol and Williamson (2012) pointed out that "[i]n late 2009, the mainstream media's almost universal assumption was that extremist views hold a significant place in the Tea Party. In the following year, however, that

assessment was turned on its head… [w]ith newfound credentials as an electoral force and kingmaker, the Tea Party was suddenly something all sorts of media outlets felt they had to probe, characterize, and feature" (p. 141-142).

For much of 2010, media depicted the TPM as a social movement with a popular mandate (p. 143). By failing to reveal its limited scope of support and deeply conservative ideology, a misleading and overly positive discourse was formed (p. 145).

The issue with this reporting is that, on one hand, it labeled the TPM as something it is not; on the other hand, it depicted the movement in a more positive light. As Joel Meares (2011) wrote for the *Columbia Journalism Review*, "The problem with … many reports on the still amorphous movement, the writers for the most part treat the movement as uniform and un-conflicted … Without a more nuanced treatment of this not-monolithic movement, readers are left with the impression, encouraged by each new report of this nature, that the Tea Party is something it isn't."

The embrace of the mainstream media is evident in its sympathetic if not positive coverage of the TPM, and it is crystallized in the coverage of the healthcare debate. Skinner (2012) found that "mainstream media has reinforced the 'government takeover' trope by failing not only to notice that provisions to regulate markets are not hostile to markets, but that the neoliberal policies require state intervention when the facilitation of capital requires it" (p. 610).

Even responding to the conservative messages on healthcare and tax, liberals had already given up their control over the "agenda setting." DiMaggio (2011) noted: "[liberals] were allowing conservatives to dominate the national agenda. Liberals' obsession with conservative propaganda translated into a tremendous amplification of these messages" (p. 157). Such attitudes contributed to what Skinner (2012) called "a fear of taking positions on fact," leading to

"affirming Tea Party ideology and leaving the constitutive paradoxes of its views of health care unexplored" (p. 618).

This Study

While many studies examined the role conservative media outlets and major television networks played in the TPM's rise, few attempts were made to investigate how mainstream print media covered the movement, with DiMaggio's 2011 study the only case we found. It is against such a background that we brought forth our research.

DiMaggio (2011) followed the same logic to dissect how the conservative echo chamber and Fox News effectively pressured the mainstream media to cover the TPM. He also extensively examined how mainstream media and left-wing media covered the healthcare debate. However, he primarily focused on the news sections of *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and how inherent media bias impacts the coverage's visibility and framing. The approach of the current study is different in several aspects:

- Media outlets. This research analyzed the opinion articles published in the U.S. mainstream media outlets, namely the NYT and the WSJ, because the NYT has long been viewed as a leading liberal voice and WSJ a conservative fortress. Additionally, this study focuses on print media, rather than broadcast coverage of the movement as the newspaper content could be easily and objectively examined in a computer-aided content analysis.

- Types of content. In this research, we focus on opinion pieces rather than news reports.

The advantage is it would yield insights on how newspapers impact the opinions

they publish. Additionally, it would shed light on how opinion leaders, in many cases

representing the foremost political voices in the country, perceived the populist

movement.

- Focus of media effect. By adopting a more nuanced approach and following what a
computer-aided content analysis would offer, we hope that the analyses provide us with a
more detailed and unique understanding of how opinion leaders responded to the
Midterm Election in 2010.

The Theoretical Framework

The current research employs the theoretical framework of Discourse Theory (Laclau,

2005; Laclau, & Mouffe, 1985), which is a good fit in analyzing opinion leaders' attitudes

towards the populism expressed in the TPM. As scholars note, Discourse Theory, representing a

multi-disciplinary approach encompassing psychoanalysis, critical and political theory, provides

a theoretical lens to examine phenomena related to both political discourse and journalism

practices (Jutel, 2016). Discourse Theory holds that antagonism is the political logic of social

movements, and discourses are contextualized with "interplay of a logic of difference and logic

of equivalence" (Phelan & Dahlberg, 2011), suggesting the friend-enemy dichotomy (Jutel,

2016).

Jutel (2016) argues that "the field of journalism stands for a universalism and truth that is

inclusive and constitutive of the liberal-democratic public… all can have access to rationality

and universal truths, populism claims exclusive access to the universal as privileged agents of

history engaged in righteous struggle. Where the liberal political class attempt to find common ground, the Tea Party are invested in the spectral figure of Obama-as-enemy" (Jutel, 2016, p. 1130). Thus, Discourse Theory offers important insights as to how we could investigate opinion leaders' perceptions toward populism, in this case the TPM.

This study analyzed both the liberal and conservative perspectives represented by the NYT and WSJ towards the TPM. With the help of LWIC, the analysis mainly focused on some psychological effects of the opinion articles under study.

Psychological Effects

Tausczik and Pennebaker (2010) said, "Words and language, then, are the very stuff of psychology and communication. They are the medium by which cognitive, personality, clinical, and social psychologists attempt to understand human beings" (p. 25).

Because viewers would internalize and intrinsically accept messages and discourse spread by the media, we find it important to take a look at the intention of opinion pieces. As Guardino and Snyder (2012) pointed out: "[T]he corporate media's amplification of divisive Tea Party discourse can have powerful psychological effects, increasing feelings of aversion and anxiety while closing off reasoned policy discussion, and encouraging otherwise well-informed moderates and independents to internalize culturally charged—and purposefully divisive— misinformation" (p. 546).

Past studies in political and media psychology showed that news consumption habits could have significant implications for how news and issues are considered and evaluated. For example, Hartman (2012) found that repetition of the same information can make people believe

in things they may not consider believable first-hand.

As Cohn and colleagues (2004) pointed out, "[a]lthough most individuals who experience traumatic events do not become clinically depressed or develop posttraumatic stress disorder, studies generally find a temporary increase in negative mood" (p. 688; also see Koss & Kilpatrick, 2001; Stroebe et al., 2001).

Studies on people's reaction to traumatic events found that people take time to digest events that just happened (e.g. Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001). Therefore, Cohn and colleagues (2004) explained that "[c]ognitive activity is likely to increase after an upheaval as individuals try to comprehend, make sense of, and eventually find meaning in what happened" (p. 688).

Adopting a computer-aided content analysis software called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC 2015), we took a closer look at how opinion pieces externalize the psychological activities of the authors and the messages they are sending to the audience. As Tausczik and Pennebaker (2010) put it this way: "The degree to which people express emotion, how they express emotion, and the valence of the emotion tell us how people are experiencing the world" (p. 32). As reacting and coping with an event are so closely associated, analyzing how people react, in the format of writing, could reveal "how they cope with the event and the extent to which the event plays a role in the future" (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010, p. 32).

There are several types of important psychological effects that we are interested in this research. They are: affective processes, drive, cognitive processes, and time orientation.

Affective Processes: Positive and Negative Emotion

One of the primary focuses of this research is tone — how opinion pieces reflected the

attitudes of the respective authors and how they were interpreting the TPM. The

purpose of including opinion pieces from the two newspapers is to compare and see if there was

any difference in tone and attitude across the two papers — amplified sometimes by ideological

tilts.

To achieve that, we use LIWC's word-counts on positive and negative emotion as it

would reveal the attitudes of the authors about the subject they are covering: "positive emotion

words (e.g., love, nice, sweet) are used in writing about a positive event, and more negative

emotion words (e.g., hurt, ugly, nasty) are used in writing about a negative event" (Tausczik &

Pennebaker, 2010, p. 32; Kahn et al., 2007). Moreover, LIWC's ratings of positive and negative

emotion words also correspond with "human ratings of the writing excerpts" (Tausczik &

Pennebaker, 2010, p. 32; Alpers et al., 2005).

Analysis on positive and negative emotion would reflect the tone opinion leaders

expressed on the TPM — the subject of the opinion pieces.

Past, Present, and Future-focus

Past studies have shown that first-person singular pronouns, words indicating discrepancy

from reality (e.g., would, should, could), and present-tense verbs "naturally correlate in speech

and writing" (Cohn et al., 2004, p. 689; Biber, 1988; Pennebaker & King, 1999).

Similarly, the use of past-tense, present-tense, or future-tense would directly reflect on

whether the author of the text is more past-focused, present-focused, or future-focused.

The choice of these sets of variables came in line with the choice of including both

before-election and post-election pieces. In this case, we are interested to see whether opinion

leaders from both the left and the right have any difference in terms of time orientation.

Differentiation in time orientation may reveal a difference in how they view the success

or failure of the Democratic-controlled Congress and how positive or negative changes will take

place once the Tea Partiers enter the Congress.

Drive: Affiliation, Achievement, Power, Reward, Risk

This category of variables explains the motives, needs and drives of the authors

(Pennebaker et al., 2015b). Power implies more about status, dominance and social hierarchies,

whereas achievement implies more discussion about success and failure.

Affiliation is rarely used in covering the TPM, because it calculates the percentage score

of referencing other people — implying a focus on making friends and allies.

Reward-focus and Risk-focus are also important references for the project. Reward-focus

refers to words and phrases involving rewards, incentives, positive goals and approaches. Risk-

focus refers to those involving dangers, concerns, things to avoid (Pennebaker et al., 2015b).

Cognitive Processes: Causal, Insight, Discrepancy, Tentative, Certainty

Tausczik and Pennebaker (2010) found that "[t]he use of causal words (e.g., because,

effect, hence) and insight words (e.g., think, know, consider), two subcategories of cognitive

mechanisms, in describing a past event can suggest the active process of reappraisal… increasing

use of causal and insight words may be analogous to making reconstrual statements" (p. 35-36).

Similar studies in discussions of health and traumatic issues show the same conclusions (Kross &

Ayduk, 2008; Pennebaker et al., 1997; Boals & Klein, 2005). In such cases, causal words are

used to express trauma, as people tried to organize their thoughts for explanations.

On the other hand, people use words to express uncertainty when dealing with unfamiliar

or unsatisfying circumstances. Such words and phrases are also related to psychological

responses. For example, people tend to use more tentative words and phrases when they

are "uncertain or insecure about their topics" (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010, p. 36). Such usage

implies that the user has not yet "processed an event and formed into a story" (p. 36).

For this particular area, we are interested in whether opinion leaders were able to process

the prospect of a sweeping election (for before-election pieces) and the outcome of the election

(for after-election pieces) and whether it differs by media outlets.

Based on the literature review, two research questions are asked to explore the content of

the opinion pieces:

- RQ1. Does election outcome change the attitudes (measured by time orientation, cognitive processes, affective processes and drive) expressed on the TPM within each newspaper?

- RQ2. Were there differences in attitudes expressed on the TPM between opinion pieces published in NYT from those published in WSJ? Were such differences consistent throughout the election?

The Method

Sample and Procedure

All the opinion pieces that mention the word "Tea Party" at least once within the content were sampled from the NYT and WSJ that were published from October 3 to December 1, 2010. In other words, all the opinion pieces that were published one month before (Oct. 3 – Nov. 2, 2010) and one month after (Nov. 3 – Dec. 1, 2010) the 2010 Midterm Election Day were collected as the sample. All the articles were collected from the Factiva database, which includes opinion pieces (as well as editorial pieces) from the print and online editions of the two newspapers.

A total of 145 pieces were collected, among them 46 pieces were from NYT and 26 pieces from WSJ before the Midterm election; 41 pieces from NYT and 32 from WSJ after the election.

Each of the opinion pieces was read by two coders. A few pieces that failed to discuss the TPM as a major subject were removed from the sample, though they might mention the term TPM a few times. The two coders worked together to judge the relevance of opinion pieces and removed irrelevant pieces after they reached a consensus.

The Coding Process

The coders were instructed to identify pieces that cover the TPM as 1, otherwise 2. If any of the following three conditions was met, the piece would be identified as 1:

- Whether it repeatedly mentions the term Tea Party or members associated with the movement (e.g. Sarah Palin, Christine O'Donnell, Michelle Backmann, Sharron Angle, Marco Rubio, Linda McMahon)
- Whether the piece is written by or primarily covers a member of the Tea Party (e.g. Jim DeMint & Dick Armey)
- Whether specific parts or paragraphs of the piece repeatedly cover the Tea Party

A preliminary test was conducted to see how well the instruction worked. Ten pieces

were read and coded, with 9 being the same. The inter-coder reliability was satisfactory, with a *Cohen's Kappa* of 0.80.

The Outcomes

Without communication, the coders independently read and coded all 145 pieces. Of them, 138 were coded in the same way. The inter-coder reliability was high, with a *Cohen's Kappa* of 0.904.

Final Decision

We therefore accepted the result and removed *only* those pieces that were coded as 2 (irrelevant to TPM) by *both* of the coders. Of the 145 articles, 67 were removed. Of the remaining opinion pieces:

- 78 pieces remained, with 43 published before the election and 35 published after the election.
- For before-election pieces, 23 were from NYT and 20 from WSJ.
- For after-election pieces, 21 were from NYT and 14 from WSJ.

Computer-Aided Content Analysis with LIWC 2015

Each of the pieces was input into and analyzed by a computerized content analysis software named Linguistic Inquiry and Word Counts, or LIWC 2015 (see Pennebaker et al., 2015).

LIWC first searches through each of the opinion articles and sees if any words or phrases in the opinion piece match with the 6,400 words or word stems programmed in the LIWC dictionary (Pennebaker et al., 2015). The 6,400 words or word stems were previously categorized by linguists, psychologists and other experts into more than 80 linguistic dimensions. These dimensions include different categories of variables to be generated, including language

elements (e.g., total word count, percentages of articles, prepositions and pronouns used), psychological processes (e.g., percentage of positive and negative words used; percentage use of causal words and insight words), and other content-based dimensions (e.g., attribution to social relations, sex, death, occupation, etc.) (Pennebaker et al., 2005). After counting the number of matched words within any given text for each of these categories, the output divides the raw counts of matched words by the total words in the selected opinion pieces and generates the percentage to represent the proportion of selected words.

The validity of LIWC has been superior, as versions of the software have been updated to reflect social changes and the usages of different words and phrases within its libraries (Pennebaker et al., 2007). In addition, its high internal validity provides reliable outcomes in psychological studies: "LIWC has been extensively validated and has provided substantial evidence about the social and psychological implications of word use" (Cohn et al., 2004, p. 687; *see also* Pennebaker et al., 2003).

LIWC 2015 that was used in this study is in its third generation with updated variable categories, dictionaries, etc.

The Analysis Process

As each opinion piece was processed by LIWC, all words and phrases were analyzed and compared with the words or word items in each LIWC category to see if any word matched, and how frequently they matched. The results were then output into a spreadsheet, showing the percentage of the words used in the article out of the whole piece. For each variable, a *t*-test was conducted to test the sample means and to detect potential shifts.

The Variables

The software LIWC 2015 contains sets of dictionaries consisting of words and phrases that psychologists deemed related to the respective categories.

Variables Selection

Of all the 90 output variables created for the software:

- 3 general descriptor variables (words per sentence, percent of target words captured by the dictionary, and percent of words in the text that are longer than six letters), 21 standard linguistic variables (e.g. pronouns, articles, auxiliary verbs, etc.), 5 informal language markers (e.g. assents, fillers, swear words, netspeak), and 12 punctuation variables were also removed, as this research is intended to interpret based on semantic and linguistic traits.

- 6 personal concern variables (e.g. work, home, leisure), 4 social process-related variables (family, friends, female references, male references), perceptual processes (see, hear, feel), biological processes (body, health, sexual, ingestion) were also removed due to a lack of relevance to the content.

Besides the four summary variables (which were generated automatically with internal algorithms), the remaining variables were counted automatically by calculating the percentage of those words in the opinion pieces that matched with those in the selected dictionaries (with internal consistency scores shown).

Summary Variables

The four summary variables (analytical thinking, emotion tone, clout, authenticity) are created by LIWC based on clinical research outcomes in the respective fields. Each variable is derived from previously published findings from lab research and converted into percentiles after standardizing the scores from larger samples of texts.

Although the summary variables are non-transparent in term of their algorithms and compositions, they are clearly based on existing word-count variables from the related categories.

A closer study of the respective publications (Pennebaker et al., 2014; Kacewicz et al., 2012; Newman et al., 2003; Cohn et al., 2004) reveals that:

- Analytical thinking: the higher the number is, the more it reflects formal, logical, and hierarchical thinking (Pennebaker et al., 2014; Pennebaker et al., 2015b);

- Clout: the higher the number is, the more it reflects a perspective of high expertise and confidence (Kacewicz et al., 2012; Pennebaker et al., 2015b);

- Authenticity: the higher the number is, the more it reflects an honest, personal, and disclosing tone (Newman et al., 2003; Pennebaker et al., 2015b)

- Emotional tone: a higher number reflects a more positive, upbeat style; a low number reveals greater anxiety, sadness, or hostility; A number around 50 suggests either a lack of emotionality or different levels of ambivalence (Cohn et al., 2004; Pennebaker et al., 2015b)

Word-count Variables

Different from summary variables that are generated out of secondary research and modeling, word-count variables are generated directly with dictionaries and calculation of percentage scores of the matched words. The following variables are the word-count variables:

Table 1. Variable Selection

Category	Variable Name	Words in Dictionary	Word Example	Internal Consistency (Corrected Cronbach's α)
Affective Processes	Positive Emotion	620	love, nice, sweet	0.64
	Negative Emotion	744	hurt, ugly, nasty	0.55
	Anxiety	116	worried, nervous	0.73
	Anger	230	hate, kill, annoyed	0.53
	Sadness	136	crying, grief, sad	0.70
Cognitive Processes	Insight	259	think, know	0.84
	Causation	135	because, effect	0.67
	Discrepancy	83	should, would	0.76
	Tentative	178	maybe, perhaps	0.83
	Certainty	113	always, never	0.73
	Differentiation	81	hasn't, but, else	0.78
Drive	Affiliation	248	ally, friend, social	0.80
	Achievement	213	win, success, better	0.81
	Power	518	superior, bully	0.76
	Reward	120	take, prize, benefit	0.69
	Risk	103	danger, doubt	0.68
Time Orientation	Past Focus	341	ago, did, talked	0.64
	Present Focus	424	today, is, now	0.66
	Future Focus	97	may, will, soon	0.68

Note: Although specific words in each category's dictionary were omitted, examples were given to show how words correspond to each category. As the software designers made it clear, all the variables are somewhat correlated with one another but still present distinctive psychological meanings. In this chart, Cronbach's α were calculated to show each variable's internal consistency, measuring how reliable the same sets of outcomes are yielded out of the software. For Cronbach's α: Good ≥0.8, 0.8>Acceptable≥0.7, 0.7>Questionable≥0.6, 0.6>Poor≥0.5.

The Results

Summary Variables Comparisons

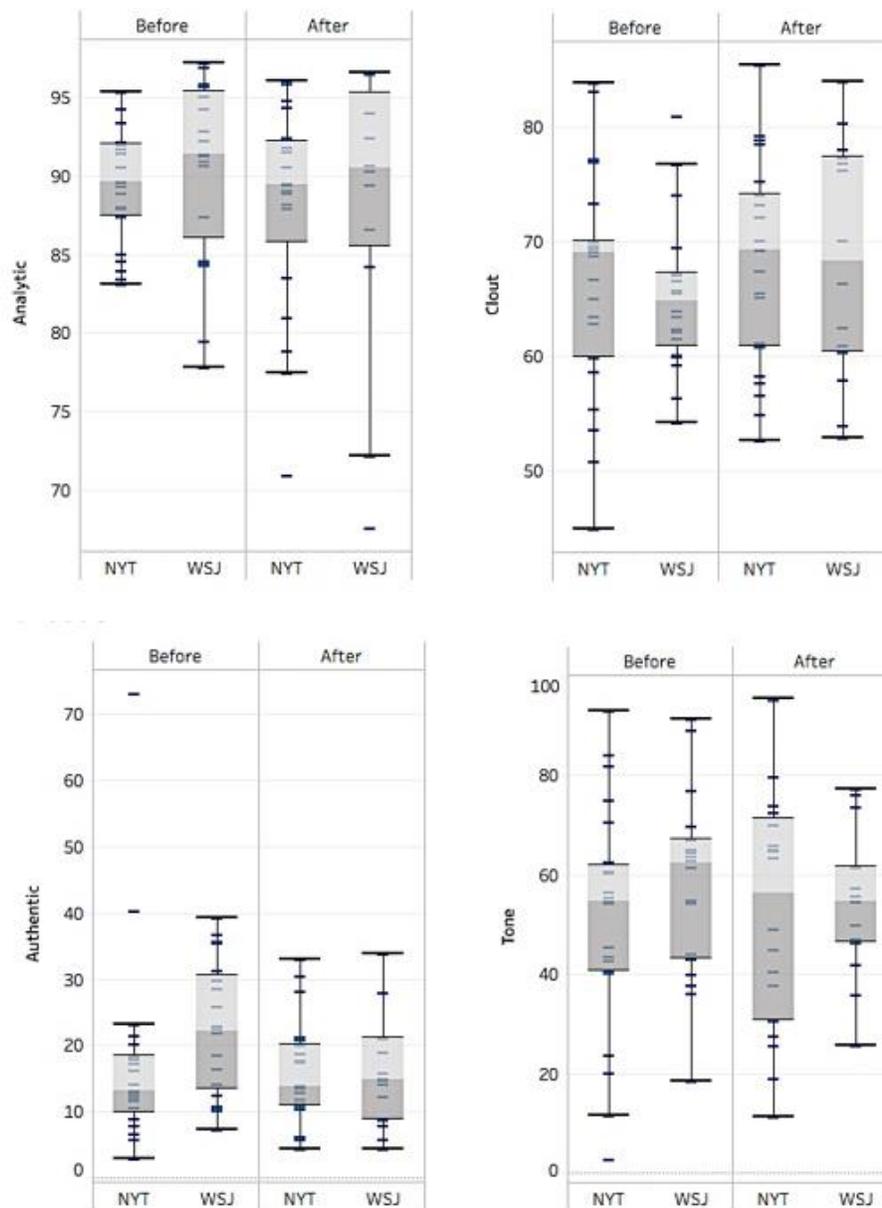The spread of the summary variables is presented below in the boxplots:

Figure 1. Boxplots of Four Summary Variables

A series of *t*-tests were conducted for both before- and after-election comparison and comparison between newspapers. No significance was detected for any of the summary variables under study.

We conclude, based on the information above, that the general tone and attitudes of the movement did not change significantly according to the election outcome — represented by the timing of the publication; also, there was no significant difference of attitude between the two newspapers.

However, the opinion pieces reflect high level of analytical thinking but relatively low level of authenticity — meaning that the tone was guarded and distanced from the subject. The outcomes may reflect the efforts of the opinion leaders to maintain objectiveness in commenting the TPM.

The general emotion tone was statistically different from 50 — the neutral tone mark. It implies that various types of opinions about the TPM were presented in a balanced fashion in both newspapers and in the periods before and after the Midterm Election in 2010.

Since the summary variables did not reveal significant shift of emotions and tones due to the election outcome or the publication, we extend our analyses to the more detailed word-count variables.

Before-Election *vs*. Post-Election Comparisons

First, we compared if there were any changes regarding the opinion pieces' tone between those published one month before and one month after the election in each newspaper. Each variable was collected with comparison of the sample means using two-sample *t*-test.

(1) The New York Times:

Table 2. New York Times Before- and After-Election Comparison

Category	Variable Name	Before-Election Sample Mean (Standard Deviation)	After-Election Sample Mean (Standard Deviation)	T-statistic	*p*-value
Affective Processes	Positive Emotion	3.208 (1.053)	3.440 (1.251)	-.669	.507
	Negative Emotion	1.917 (.746)	1.969 (.773)	-.227	.821
	Anxiety	.326 (.198)	.203 (.185)	2.122	.040**
	Anger	.718 (.465)	.564 (.314)	1.300	.201
	Sadness	.255 (.155)	.472 (.409)	-2.287	.031**
Cognitive Processes	Insight	1.863 (.466)	1.868 (.563)	-.029	.977
	Causation	1.562 (.585)	1.309 (.518)	1.516	.137
	Discrepancy	1.119 (.499)	1.442 (.557)	-2.032	.049**
	Tentative	2.374 (.684)	2.444 (1.168)	-.239	.812
	Certainty	1.212 (.397)	1.412 (.504)	-1.469	.149
	Differentiation	2.763 (.485)	2.744 (.855)	.088	.930
Drive	Affiliation	2.128 (.944)	2.090 (.892)	.138	.891
	Achievement	1.460 (.492)	1.883 (.635)	-2.482	.017**
	Power	3.953 (1.000)	4.100 (1.126)	-.459	.649
	Reward	.954 (.341)	1.249 (.808)	-1.548	.134
	Risk	.483 (.191)	.562 (.326)	-.967	.340
Time Orientation	Past Focus	3.445 (1.308)	3.997 (1.618)	-1.248	.219
	Present Focus	6.313 (1.637)	6.303 (1.649)	.020	.984
	Future Focus	1.026 (.568)	1.147 (.410)	-.807	.424

*Note: Mean sample scores for each variable are shown within the table, with standard deviation shown in parentheses. For those that are different in sample variance, a Welch Two-sample T-test is conducted. Standard Deviations for each sample mean are indicated in parentheses under the means. *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.*

As Table 2 shows, among the emotions, only anxiety and sadness recorded a statistically significant change between before and post-election pieces. While the anxiety among the opinion pieces decreased, sadness increased.

Similarly, discrepancy was the only variable in the category of Cognitive Processes that had significant increase after the election. Davis and Nolen-Hoeksema (2001) recognized that cognitive activity, represented here by the cognitive process variables, tends to increase after an upheaval as individuals try to make sense of the events happening before them. On the other hand, for the category of Drive, only reference to achievement substantially increased.

(2) The Wall Street Journal:

Table 3. Wall Street Journal Before- and After-Election Comparison

Category	Variable Name	Before-Election Sample Mean (Standard Deviation)	After-Election Sample Mean (Standard Deviation)	T-statistic	*p*-value
Affective Processes	Positive Emotion	3.458 (.892)	2.959 (.807)	1.669	.105
	Negative Emotion	1.715 (.725)	1.544 (.545)	.745	.460
	Anxiety	.301 (.219)	.284 (.187)	.225	.824
	Anger	.443 (.228)	.419 (.184)	.315	.755
	Sadness	.321 (.205)	.364 (.289)	-.506	.616
Cognitive Processes	Insight	1.974 (.840)	1.765 (.610)	.796	.432
	Causation	1.764 (.744)	1.379 (.688)	1.532	.135
	Discrepancy	1.015 (.362)	1.306 (.579)	-1.182	.079*
	Tentative	2.092 (.697)	2.244 (1.011)	-.523	.605
	Certainty	1.070 (.340)	1.231 (.520)	-1.092	.283
	Differentiation	2.644 (.684)	2.701 (.466)	-.269	.790

Drive	Affiliation	2.148 (.559)	1.892 (.670)	1.208	.236
	Achievement	1.667 (.497)	2.121 (.879)	-1.745	.097*
	Power	4.819 (1.133)	5.274 (.990)	-1.212	.234
	Reward	1.067 (.393)	1.122 (.307)	-.439	.664
	Risk	.776 (.525)	.618 (.512)	.870	.391
Time Orientation	Past Focus	2.715 (1.074)	3.429 (1.366)	-1.706	.098*
	Present Focus	7.663 (1.181)	7.336 (2.389)	.473	.642
	Future Focus	1.016 (.546)	1.449 (.524)	-2.317	.027**

*Note: Mean sample scores for each variable are shown within the table, with standard deviation shown in parentheses. For those that are different in sample variance, a Welch Two-sample T-test is conducted. Standard Deviations for each sample mean are indicated in parentheses under the means. *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.*

As Table 3 shows, WSJ's pieces saw no significant change across the board. The only statistically significant change was in the variable of future focus, which witnessed a significant increase.

A substantial but not significant change also took place for discrepancy, reference of achievement, and past focus.

The New York Times vs. The Wall Street Journal **Comparisons**

(1) Before-Election Pieces:

Table 4. Before Election Comparison

Category	Variable Name	New York Times Sample Mean (Standard Deviation)	Wall Street Journal Sample Mean (Standard Deviation)	*t*	*p*-value
Affective Processes	Positive Emotion	3.208 (1.053)	3.458 (.892)	-.835	.409
	Negative Emotion	1.917 (.746)	1.715 (.725)	.897	.375

	Anxiety	.326 (.198)	.301 (.219)	.402	.690
	Anger	.718 (.465)	.443 (.228)	2.516	.017**
	Sadness	.255 (.155)	.321 (.205)	-1.207	.234
Cognitive Processes	Insight	1.863 (.466)	1.974 (.840)	-.527	.602
	Causation	1.562 (.585)	1.764 (.744)	-.995	.326
	Discrepancy	1.119 (.499)	1.015 (.362)	.777	.441
	Tentative	2.374 (.684)	2.092 (.697)	1.339	.188
	Certainty	1.212 (.397)	1.070 (.340)	1.250	.218
	Differentiation	2.763 (.485)	2.644 (.684)	.664	.510
Drive	Affiliation	2.128 (.944)	2.148 (.559)	-.082	.935
	Achievement	1.460 (.492)	1.667 (.497)	-1.367	.179
	Power	3.953 (1.000)	4.819 (1.133)	-2.663	.011**
	Reward	.954 (.341)	1.067 (.393)	-1.007	.320
	Risk	.483 (.191)	.776 (.525)	-2.355	.027**
Time Orientation	Past Focus	3.445 (1.308)	2.715 (1.074)	-1.983	.054*
	Present Focus	6.303 (1.649)	7.663 (1.181)	-3.059	.004***
	Future Focus	1.147 (.410)	1.016 (.546)	.060	.953

*Note: Mean sample scores for each variable are shown within the table, with standard deviation shown in parentheses. For those that are different in sample variance, a Welch Two-sample T-test is conducted. Standard Deviations for each sample mean are indicated in parentheses under the means. *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.*

Table 4 draws comparisons between NYT's pieces before the election and that of WSJ. Although most of the pieces were similar, more anger was expressed in NYT's pieces. There were more references to power and risk in WSJ.

NYT's pieces were more past-focused and WSJ's pieces were more present-focused, while there were insignificant differences in future-focused in this case.

(2) Post-Election Pieces:

Table 5. Post-Election Comparison

Category	Variable Name	New York Times Sample Mean (Standard Deviation)	Wall Street Journal Sample Mean (Standard Deviation)	T-statistic	*p*-value
Affective Processes	Positive Emotion	3.440 (1.251)	2.959 (.807)	1.270	.213
	Negative Emotion	1.969 (.773)	1.544 (.545)	1.780	.084*
	Anxiety	.203 (.185)	.284 (.187)	-1.263	.215
	Anger	.564 (.314)	.419 (.184)	1.711	.097*
	Sadness	.472 (.409)	.364 (.289)	.854	.399
Cognitive Processes	Insight	1.868 (.563)	1.765 (.610)	.511	.613
	Causation	1.309 (.518)	1.379 (.688)	.343	.734
	Discrepancy	1.442 (.557)	1.306 (.579)	.697	.491
	Tentative	2.444 (1.168)	2.244 (1.011)	.522	.605
	Certainty	1.412 (.504)	1.231 (.520)	1.031	.310
	Differentiation	2.744 (.855)	2.701 (.466)	.194	.847
Drive	Affiliation	2.090 (.892)	1.892 (.670)	.706	.485
	Achievement	1.883 (.635)	2.121 (.879)	-.929	.360
	Power	4.100 (1.126)	5.274 (.990)	-3.167	.003***
	Reward	1.249 (.808)	1.122 (.307)	.650	.521
	Risk	.562 (.326)	.618 (.512)	-.393	.697
Time Orientation	Past Focus	3.997 (1.618)	3.429 (1.366)	-1.081	.288
	Present Focus	6.313 (1.637)	7.336 (2.389)	-1.517	.139
	Future Focus	1.026 (.568)	1.449 (.524)	-1.909	.065*

Note: Mean sample scores for each variable are shown within the table, with standard deviation shown in parentheses. For those that are different in sample variance, a Welch Two-sample T-test is conducted. Standard Deviations for each sample mean are indicated in parentheses under the means. *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 5 draws comparisons between NYT's pieces after the election and that of WSJ. Similar to our finding for before-election pieces, more anger was expressed in NYT's pieces. This in part contributed to the more negative emotion expressed in NYT.

There were still more references to power in WSJ. Additionally, their pieces were also more future-focused.

Discussion

Analyzing Summary Variables

As we discussed in the literature review, discourse theory provides us with a framework in connecting psychoanalysis with the analysis on political attitudes, tone, and reactions. The essential point is that semantic and linguistic signs draw direct links between how the opinion leaders responded psychologically and the events and why they reacted in such ways. What is missing in the process can be explained by reasoning from political contexts and backgrounds.

First, the relatively high level of analytical thinking and clout across-the-board reveal that opinion leaders held firm beliefs in what they were arguing about the TPM and made effective arguments in supporting their arguments. However, that is not the primary focus of the study.

The key is in authenticity and emotion tone. The low level of authenticity reveals a distanced discourse, which is in line with short-term emotional response to a sudden event. The distanced discourse can be interpreted as opinion leaders trying to adjust their views to the event — the rise of the TPM. The discourse shows that while they were adjusting and processing the effect, they were formulating a narrative that is observational and tentative in order to not jump ahead of themselves.

The emotion tone for before- and after-election opinion pieces remained around 50, showing no significant deviation from a neutral emotional tone. There was also no significant difference between the two publications, which reveals that a variety of viewpoints were represented in both newspapers and that there was no obvious sympathizing or positive attitudes about the TPM from the papers.

Analyzing Word-Count Variables

word-count variables give a mixed review of the opinions. There are several things worth noticing.

Firstly, the primary concern of this research is tone, which is closely associated with the affective processes variables.

The opinion pieces, in the terms reflected in this study, were highly similar between before and post-election. Few substantial changes took place in the events of a month. We would argue that the timing and the outcome of the election did not play significant roles in shaping most of the opinion pieces. It would also follow to say that with such proximity to the election, the outcome would have been pretty clear, except the particular strength of the TPM is recognized and that a wave election is anticipated (although it was very hard to predict exactly how many Democratic incumbents in the House of Representatives would lose seats in the election due to fluid polling data; and it was unclear how many Tea Partiers would be elected and how much of the outcome can be attributed to the rise of Tea Party). Similarly, few changes in attitudes took place after the election, because the opinion leaders had little time to fully process the election outcome.

The opinion pieces also do not differentiate much between the two newspapers. Tone (measured by emotions and affective processes) for both newspapers were well represented across the negative-positive spectrum, revealing that both papers have absorbed a variety of opinions supporting or opposing the TPM and its implications in the election. What's more, the variables under Cognitive Processes were also highly similar. This would imply that opinion pieces in both papers show the same level of insight and certainty, meaning that the authors believed what they were talking about and were narrating in the same way.

The key differences on time orientation were that: As WSJ talks more about the both the past and future after the election, it would be reasonable to assume that many opinion pieces were reviewing what to expect for the new Congress and the newly elected Tea Party candidates. Therefore, WSJ is more future-focused in its after-election pieces. Additionally, NYT is more past-focused than WSJ in before-election pieces, showing more reflection about the past and potential worries about the election outcomes. On the other hand, WSJ talked more about the present situation.

It is interesting to notice that opinion pieces in NYT showed more anger in both before- and after-election pieces. In addition, anger remained steady before and after-election but sadness increased. On the other hand, anxiety has decreased. This would imply that after the outcome became clear, the opinion leaders in The Times were less anxious about the outcome, acknowledged the defeat of the Democrats, and remained in dismay.

The consistently higher percentage of anger expressed by opinion pieces in NYT show that there was always more anger towards the TPM.

Lastly, references to power and risk were consistently higher in WSJ. Thus, there were both recognition of status and power of the TPM and recognition of danger and worries.

Contexts to Consider

While quantitative measurement, represented here by the sample mean tests, could reveal a general picture of the opinions on the TPM, how specific opinion leaders reacted to the election outcomes and how opinions vary across publications and across specific authors could not be answered without a look at the content and context of the coverage.

While these are not within the purview of this project, it is important that we note the important context it would provide.

Differences Between Editorials and Other Opinion Pieces

On the one hand, while we can generally describe WSJ as a conservative newspaper where Republican-aligned and conservative points of view are more represented in the opinion sections and NYT is a more liberal and Democrat-aligned one, we cannot simply say that *only* one set of opinions is represented in each of the two newspapers. Likewise, we cannot simply argue that the opinion tilts of the columnists and opinion writers are consistent with the ideological tilts of the editorial board.

While it is true that WSJ is a conservative newspaper and NYT is a liberal newspaper from an audience's perspective, we need to differentiate that from the perspectives of the individual opinion writers (Blake, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2014).

It is important to note that several editorial pieces were included from both papers in this project. So both opinions of the editorial board and of the opinion leaders were represented in this project as whole. But the reason why we do not differentiate editorials from opinion pieces are that: (1) they both represent the general tones and attitudes (or ideological tilts) of the newspapers as a whole to the audience; (2) several opinion pieces included in this study were written separately by member(s) of the editorial board. Similarly, we don't exclude opinion pieces written by people directly involved with the TPM. We don't differentiate an interview conducted between a WSJ columnist and a Tea Party-related player, or a piece written by Tea Partier Jim DeMint, or a piece by conservative pollster Scott Rasmussen.

Variations Within A Publication

On the other hand, there are variations of opinions between columnists and opinion leaders with the same publications. For example, we would not compare conservative David Brooks with liberals like Thomas Friedman and Paul Krugman in their analysis on the TPM.

Even opinion pieces written by the same opinion leaders can and always shift. In an October 22 article, WSJ columnist Peggy Noonan declared that the TPM's rise was a blessing for the Republican Party (Noonan, 2010). However, as election approached, her attitudes become more cautious during a conversation with Tea Party candidate Anna Little (Noonan, 2010b). Another example was with John Fund, also a columnist for WSJ. Fund discussed the demise of the left before the election but avoided prejudging the election in an Election Day article (Fund, 2010b). But in an interview with. Brian Baird, a Democratic representative from Washington State, he was more candid about the shifting tide of political wind (Fund, 2010).

To sum up, it is important for us to understand the context of this research and how it would impact the outcome. While the quantitative results yield important findings in the larger picture, it is also important to track the changing rhetoric of individual columnists.

Limitation of Current Research

With respect to what was discussed so far, there are several limitations of the study that confines the application of the current study.

The first limitation is on how to measure and account for the changing media environment. The reason that we need to bring this issue to light is because digital trends have made it hard to project how political opinions will affect or will be interpreted by readers and

consumers. The changing media environment are specifically shown on two parts: the development of conservative radio stations, news sites, and media outlets, forming "the Echo Chamber" on the right (Meagher, 2012; Mort, 2012); the increasingly tabloid, eye-grabbing trends of digital media - amplified by "sophisticated political advertising, rapid digital communication, and the 24/7 news cycle" (Perrin et al., p. 628).

While mainstream media outlets, especially the newspapers covered in this study — NYT and WSJ, continued to play a leading role in upholding traditional news values and combating digital disruption, we have to admit that they are no longer the dominant news platforms for news consumers. Additionally, their print platforms are also no longer their major publication platforms.

As much of the populism debate moves online, future studies may examine how populism develops on social media like Facebook, which politicians and their opponents have taken full advantage as a viable platform.

The second limitation attributes to the struggle between computer-aided content analysis and manual analysis has been the top of the debate for some time. As Pennebaker et al. (2015) noticed, even for LIWC, there are several issues that it could not address. On the one hand, it is very hard to determine the internal reliability. On the other hand, computer software can hardly recognize "context, irony, sarcasm, and idioms" (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010, p. 30).

Conclusion

Although the sample size of the study is relatively small, the study still provides valuable insight into how political pundits responded to the TPM's rise in the 2010 Midterm Election and how political opinions crystalized in the mainstream media during the same time. These findings demonstrate an important theoretical advance at the intersection of political populism and opinion leaders working in mainstream news media. The findings in this study, thus, advance the understanding of not only how mainstream media specifically depicted the rise of the TPM but also how opinion leaders led the charge.

On the one hand, a variety of emotion and tone were recorded in both NYT and WSJ. Both media absorbed a variety of opinions in their opinion sections, and different reactions to the TPM's rise in the election were expressed from both sides of the argument.

On the other hand, specific emotional responses have shifted across time. Opinion writers in NYT, politically aligned more closely with the Democratic Party, have shown more uncertainty, more unease, and more negative emotions with the outcome of the Midterm Election. But this reaction was well underway even before the election, as the outcome had been widely anticipated. On the other hand, opinion pieces in WSJ, politically more conservative and more aligned with the Republican Party, have shown consistent reactions before and after the election. This, too, may be partially attributed to the widely anticipated outcome of the election.

Additionally, the opinions expressed in WSJ showed consistently more reference to the present and the future, hinting that political changes would take place with the election, while there were more reflections of the past among opinion leaders in NYT. There was also more anger among the left, primarily showing dismay with the outcome of the election and the TPM's rise. As for the opinion pieces in WSJ, there were consistently more references to terms of

power, meaning that they focused on the power and status of the TPM, perhaps

recognizing its political strength and grassroots impact. With more references to risk, the pieces

in WSJ reflect more about the risk of gaining and retaining electoral power.

Although the outcome might be more circumstantial in many aspects, it has shown

consistently that opinion leaders from both sides of the debate recognized the TPM's rise and the

reactions were generally consistent across media outlets. That implies that the opinion leaders

expected the likely outcome of the election before the election and were able to respond in a

rational, thoughtful manner.

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