

Finding Foreigners in American National Identity: Presidential Discourse, People, and the International Community

KEVIN COE
University of Arizona

RICO NEUMANN
UN-mandated University for Peace, Costa Rica

Studies of the discursive construction of American national identity have tended toward one of two approaches: They have focused on representations of America alone, or they have looked abroad to see how America is represented in relation to a narrow, often evil, "other." This paper focuses its attention more broadly, considering the role that *foreigners*—not just leaders, but foreign citizens of all stripes—play in the construction of American national identity. By examining every mention of foreign leaders, military troops, and citizens in presidents' State of the Union addresses over eight decades, we illuminate where and how foreigners fit into the identity construction process.

National identity has long been a favorite topic of scholars (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Bloom, 1990; Poole, 1999), with American national identity gaining particular attention since the attacks of September 11 (Beasley, 2004; Dorsey, 2007; Hutcheson, Domke, Billeaudeau, & Garland, 2004; Stuckey, 2004). National identity concerns the constant process of people coming together to ask two deceptively simple questions: "Who are we? Where do we belong?" (Huntington, 2004, p. 12). The answers to these questions are important not only at the level of discourse, where they help people to "imagine" their nation and place within it (Anderson, 1991), but also in shaping the geopolitical circumstances that nations face as they engage with the rest of the world (Bloom, 1990; Holsti, 2008). The recent political turmoil in Africa and the Middle East provides just one example of how the construction of national identity matters in the political sphere. The study of American national identity has gone far in clarifying how leaders and citizens of the United States position themselves in relation to one another and the rest of the world, but this body of scholarship is not without its uncertainties.

For example, a close reading of the research in this area reveals that studies tend toward one of two approaches. The first is to focus on constructions of America qua America, emphasizing historical narratives, mythic ideals and values, and various affirmations of the nation—what Beasley (2004) calls "a rhetoric of shared beliefs" (see also Dorsey, 2007; Hutcheson et al., 2004; Smith, 1997; Stuckey, 2004).

Kevin Coe: kevincoe@email.arizona.edu

Rico Neumann: rneumann@mail.upeace.org

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This collection of studies pays specific attention to how diverse groups of Americans come to understand their place in the national community. The second approach is to focus more broadly on the international community, seeking to understand how Americans define themselves in relation to foreign entities. Poole (1999) points out that America's role as a superpower is necessarily defined in contrast to other nations. Several studies have highlighted this reality by emphasizing how U.S. foreign policy rhetoric constructs an evil "other" that has historically served to mobilize Americans against a shared enemy (e.g., Coe, Domke, Graham, John, & Pickard, 2004; Ivie, 1980; Medhurst & Brands, 2000; Wander, 1984).

Both approaches provide valuable insight into the construction of American national identity, but they also omit consideration of one foreign entity likely central to the process: people. Specifically, the former approach highlights the importance of the U.S. citizens and immigrant groups who populate the United States, while the latter focuses on foreign nations broadly, or on the "othering" of specific foreign leaders. Thus, neither approach provides insight into the role that *foreigners*—not just leaders, but foreign citizens of all stripes—play in the construction of American national identity.¹ It follows that, if diverse groups of American citizens are central to the construction of national identity, and if foreign entities such as nations and leaders are also important to this process, then diverse groups of foreigners should be as well. We argue that this is indeed the case, and we examine the presentation of foreigners in one crucial context: the U.S. presidency. By examining every mention of foreign leaders, military troops, and citizens in presidents' State of the Union addresses over eight decades, this study illuminates where and how foreigners fit into the construction of American national identity.

Locating People in National Identity Discourse

A foundational contribution to the scholarship on national identity is Anderson's (1991) work on "imagined communities." Anderson holds that nations are imagined, in that they are the result of shared perceptions among people who think of themselves as part of that community. Because most people in a given nation will never meet one another, their bond is a social construction—which ensures that communication will have an important role in its creation. Indeed, much of the scholarship on national identity has emphasized the centrality of communication. Hutcheson et al., for example, usefully conceptualize national identity as "a constructed *and* public national self-image based on membership in a political community as well as history, myths, symbols, language, and cultural norms commonly held by members of a nation" (2004, p. 28, emphasis in original). Both the "constructed" and "public" elements of this conception are noteworthy. That national identity is constructed highlights that it is ever changing, continuously being generated, shaped, and circumscribed. That national identity is public highlights that its construction is a collaborative process, happening in discourse among citizens, leaders, and media.

Our interest is where *people* fit into this process of identity construction. As far as Americans go, their role has been established in the literature. Two works in particular stand out, both of which focus on how presidents shape national identity rhetorically through an emphasis on the American people. Stuckey (2004) examines how presidential constructions of national identity have, at various times, included or

¹ It is unfortunate that, in some circles, the term "foreigner" has taken on a negative connotation. We use the term here in accordance with its standard denotation: a person who is a citizen of a foreign nation.

excluded certain groups within the U.S. population, based on such characteristics as race, gender, or religion. Stuckey argues that “Presidents reduce these complex identities to a unidimensional point and then assign this overarching identity to individuals based primarily on demography” (2004, p. 3). Beasley also studies presidential constructions of national identity, drawing a similar conclusion: “Presidents have defined American identity ideationally, [urging citizens] . . . to transcend their differences and [explaining] that they can do so only by adopting a set of proper attitudes” (2004, p. 150). Put simply, presidents assign different groups of Americans to different sociopolitical roles, nonetheless privileging a broad, shared national identity that is thought to exist among these diverse groups.

Such presidential constructions of identity, of course, do not pertain to the nation alone. In a world becoming ever more interconnected, U.S. presidents are increasingly global political actors. Their decisions affect people worldwide, and their rhetoric shapes how people abroad view the United States (Holsti, 2008). As Greenstein puts it, “The power of modern American presidents manifests itself in its purest form in the global arena” (2004, p. 4). Even so, the role of the individual in constructions of national identity is less well understood in the international context. Scholars have focused predominately on one key role that foreign entities find themselves in when presidents and other political elites construct national identity: the “other.” The way this plays out most often is that foreign adversaries are used as a convenient foil to stir nationalism and encourage a more cohesive U.S. national identity. Ivie summarizes this pattern, saying Americans “traditionally have exonerated themselves of any guilt for war . . . by decivilizing the image of their adversaries” (1990, p. 119; see also Wander, 1984). Considering the role of foreigners in identity construction—beyond this limited role as the other—is useful, given the increasingly globalized environment in which national identity operates, as well as the diverse and crucial roles that other people, namely Americans, play in this process.

Two complementary theoretical perspectives buttress this view. The first is social identity theory (SIT), which holds that people’s memberships in various groups, from their occupation to their nationality, help to define who they are, therefore informing the way they view themselves and their places in communities (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1987). Importantly, such identification processes are not bound by national borders. Rather, as Arrow and Sundberg (2004) point out, citizens of one nation might identify with those abroad based on various shared aspects of their lives, such as religious ties, common heritage, membership in a multinational organization, or a general sense of belonging to the world community. Our interest is in how international bonds of social identity might be constructed via political discourse. SIT has not regularly been incorporated into the study of political discourse, but both Price (1989) and Althaus and Coe (2011) have suggested that media cues about group membership might prime people to think about issues primarily in terms of their position as members of various in-groups, including their identity as Americans. Other political discourse may function similarly: In building identity by explicitly mentioning foreigners and their relationship to the United States, political discourse might go some distance toward stimulating or reinforcing group-based thinking among Americans. Such group-based perspectives are not to be taken lightly; they are known to influence citizens’ views about serious foreign policy issues, including support for wars (Kam & Kinder, 2007).

This perspective is reinforced by a second theoretical paradigm that helps to explain identity construction via discourse: constitutive rhetoric. Drawing on Althusser’s (1977) writings about the

ideological dimensions of language, and particularly on Burke's (1970) concept of identification, Charland (1987) describes "constitutive rhetoric" as a persuasive tool that attempts to constitute culture through language. In particular, constitutive rhetoric is at work "when advocates try to 'interpellate' or 'hail' audiences, calling a common, collective identity into existence" (Zagacki, 2007, p. 272). For example, a speaker might emphasize commonalities, such as shared ideologies or values, to establish a bond between citizens of two different nations (e.g., Drzewiecka, 2002; Zagacki, 2007), or between a majority and minority group within a single nation (e.g., Charland, 1987; Tate, 2005). Thus, constitutive rhetoric helps to clarify why presidents might focus on foreigners as they attempt to build American national identity. By making another nation's people part of the discourse, the president presents Americans with an opportunity to develop new identifications and, perhaps, to expand their sense of the world beyond U.S. borders. Of course, presidents might also employ such rhetoric "to legitimate certain forms of collective power and action" (Drzewiecka, 2002, p. 1). Regardless of which of these aims is privileged in a given case, the presence of foreigners in political discourse allows for audiences of that discourse to develop or modify understandings of their position within the international community.

The Presentation of Foreigners in Presidential Discourse

We focus our exploration of the role of foreigners in the construction of national identity on the U.S. presidency. Because of the president's prominence in public discourse and status as a national political symbol, the American presidency has become "a single site where articulations of national identity consistently appear backed by sufficient social and political power to render those articulations as matters of custom and law" (Stuckey, 2004, p. 10). With this in mind, this section of the paper provides a framework for our analysis by offering four ways in which foreigners might be discussed in presidential discourse. The simplest question that can be asked about presidents' presentation of foreigners concerns how often they talk about them. That is, what percentage of presidents' total foreign-focused discourse specifically mentions people? This is a simple question, but a crucial one, because, according to the theoretical perspectives discussed above, presidents' discussion of foreigners is what provides Americans with a reflection against which they might define themselves. If presidents regularly mention foreigners, Americans will have more opportunities to understand how those abroad are similar to or different from themselves, phenomena which, in turn, shape the parameters of American national identity. In general, we would expect presidents to refer more often to foreign nations than to foreign people specifically, because the former is more abstract and thus more consistent with presidents' typical foreign policy rhetoric, which tends to shy away from specifics (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008; Wander, 1984).

A second question is this: What role do presidents assign to foreigners? We would expect presidents to present different groups of foreigners differently, depending on how they fit into broader geopolitical circumstances. For example, scholarship on U.S. foreign policy rhetoric indicates that America is typically framed as the primary leader of a "world order" of sorts, one that is based on political freedom, basic human rights, and the spread of free markets (e.g., Coe, 2007; Hollihan, 1986; Medhurst & Brands, 2000; Wander, 1984). If so, then any time a president mentions foreigners, he likely positions them within this world order, explicitly or, perhaps, implicitly. At least three options for this relationship are possible, each of which would have different implications for identity construction: (1) An entity might be a participant in the world order, by supporting it directly, benefitting from it in some way, or approaching

this status; (2) an entity might be a dissenter from the world order, either by threatening it directly or by simply choosing not to participate (and thereby threatening it indirectly); or (3) an entity might be a victim of the world order, in that it is being kept from fully participating in or enjoying the benefits of the world order. These different roles would suggest very different possibilities for the construction of American national identity.

Third, we can ask how presidents evaluate foreigners. Are they generally positive, negative, or neutral in their appraisal of people abroad? Particularly relevant to this question is how foreign leaders and citizens might be evaluated differently. From a perspective of identity formation, these two groups of people might operate quite distinctly in discourse. Social identity theory suggests that people are inclined to identify with those who are most similar to them (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1987). As a result, American citizens might feel a stronger connection to foreign citizens than to foreign leaders, the former being nearer to their own social position than the latter. If presidents are interested in building identity, we might expect them to make more favorable mentions of foreign citizens than leaders. This approach could have the added benefit of potentially generating increased U.S. support among a nation's citizens, even if the leaders of that nation were in conflict with the United States.

Finally, in constructing national identity, one of the most overt approaches a president could use would be to explicitly present another nation's people as an exemplar the United States might follow. Imitation, as the saying goes, is the sincerest form of flattery. To the extent that presidents see value in other foreigners' actions and ideas, they might suggest that Americans try to emulate them—and this would no doubt shape Americans' understandings of where they belong vis-à-vis people in other nations. We would expect such explicit statements to be quite rare. Scholars have noted that presidents adhere to the notion of American exceptionalism, which suggests that America is unique in the world because of its founding principles and the success and stability of its democracy (see Lipset, 1996; Shafer, 1991). If so, it seems likely that presidents would tend toward positioning Americans as the people the rest of the world should be following, rather than providing foreign exemplars from which Americans might learn.

Method

Our analysis focuses on the modern presidency, which scholars generally define as beginning with Franklin Roosevelt. During Roosevelt's lengthy tenure, the United States and the presidency changed significantly (Greenstein, 2004). Therefore, beginning with Roosevelt will allow for multiple presidents to be included in the analysis while still holding roughly constant the cultural position of these presidents. Given our interest in presidential identity construction, we have chosen to analyze State of the Union addresses. These addresses are ideal for several reasons. First, modern presidents have no greater venue for building American identity than the State of the Union message. During such high state occasions, citizens look to the president as one way of imagining "what the United States is and what it means to be American" (Domke & Coe, 2008, p. 51). Second, in State of the Union addresses, presidents regularly devote considerable attention to foreign affairs, but they do so in a context that necessarily ties these foreign affairs to domestic realities (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008). Finally, major presidential addresses such as the State of the Union draw the largest audiences and most intense media coverage of any presidential communications, which increases the chance that they will shape public perceptions. Our

analysis thus focuses on every State of the Union message delivered to the American people from Roosevelt's first in 1934 to George W. Bush's last in 2008, a total of 69 speeches.²

We content-analyzed these speeches, with the unit of analysis being a single "mention" of any foreign entity (i.e., person, city, nation, or region). To begin, the two authors together read each speech to ensure that every mention was noted. A total of 2,600 mentions were identified. A small percentage of these mentions (approximately 10%) were excluded from the analysis because they were used only to reference a historical period (e.g., Vietnam-era inflation) or the site of a summit that had led to specific regulations (e.g., the Geneva Conventions), or because they were international organizations and thus not tied directly to a specific nation (e.g., the United Nations). The final analysis therefore included 2,330 mentions. Each mention was coded according to the following categories.

Role in world order. This category identified the foreign entity's primary role in the world order, as envisioned by the United States (discussed above). Entities were coded as either *participants* in the world order (those that supported, sustained, or benefitted from the world order, or were approaching this status), *dissenters* from the world order (those that were threatening, or choosing not to participate in, the world order), or *victims* of the world order (those that were being kept from participating in or enjoying the benefits of the world order). Examples of participants language included "America's partners and friends in Western Europe" and "to explore promptly all possible areas of cooperation with the Soviet Union." Examples of dissenters language included "relentless pressures of the Chinese Communists" and "a tangled and turbulent Congo." Examples of victims language included "brave and oppressed people of Iraq" and "threat to the brave city of Berlin."

Tone. This category identified whether the foreign entity came away from the mention looking *positive*, *neutral*, or *negative* to a typical U.S. audience. Any mention of a crisis situation garnered a negative code, whereas any mention of progress garnered a positive code. Examples of positive tone included "Pakistan is now cracking down on terror, and I admire the strong leadership of President Musharraf" and "the indomitable Dutch." Examples of negative tone included "the wall of shame dividing Berlin" and "on the Korean Peninsula, an oppressive regime rules." A neutral tone was present in mentions that excluded a clear evaluative component, such as "competitors like India and China."

Citizens. This category identified whether the mention of the foreign entity explicitly referenced people (other than military troops or leaders of the entity). Examples included "people of free Berlin" and "the Afghan people."

² Those instances where presidents delivered a written rather than spoken State of the Union (Truman, 1946, 1953; Eisenhower, 1961; Nixon, 1973; Carter, 1981) were excluded from the analysis. In the two cases where the speech was written but then a summarized version was delivered to the American people (Roosevelt, 1945; Eisenhower, 1956), the latter was used. The one State of the Union address that Barack Obama had delivered at the time of this writing was not included in the analysis because this single address would not allow meaningful generalizations. However, to conclude the results section, we examine this speech on its own.

Leaders. This category identified whether the mention of the foreign entity explicitly referenced leaders (other than solely military leaders). Examples included “Mr. Gorbachev’s upcoming visit to America” and “Slobodan Milosevic unleashed his terror on Kosovo.”

Troops. This category identified whether the mention of the foreign entity explicitly referenced military troops, including military leaders. Examples included “South Vietnamese security forces” and “Soviet combat and military personnel.”

Exemplar. This category identified whether the foreign entity was explicitly presented as an exemplar from which America or its people might learn, or whose guidance might be followed. This code was extremely rare; an example is presented in the results section.

One author completed the content analysis. As a check of reliability, the other author coded approximately 12% of the speeches. For the role in the world order variable, the rate of agreement was .91, which was .88 after controlling for agreement by chance (see Scott, 1955). For tone, agreement was .87, and .81 after controlling for chance. For both citizens and leaders, agreement was .95, and .90 after controlling for chance. For troops, agreement was .98, and .96 after controlling for chance. For exemplar, agreement was 1.0.

Results

To begin exploring where and how people fit into presidents’ foreign-focused discourse, we considered the percentage of this discourse that is constituted by people. Of the 2,330 foreign entities mentioned by presidents over the past eight decades, 1,657 (71.1%) made no mention of people whatsoever. Clearly, presidents present the global landscape as existing of places first, with people a distant second. Indeed, it has been quite common in State of the Union addresses for presidents to mention several nations or regions that America is involved with, without directly mentioning the people in those nations (e.g., “Democracy is on the march in Central and South America. Communist Nicaragua is the odd man out”—Reagan, 1987).³ When presidents do mention people, they focus more on leaders (12.4% of all foreign mentions) and citizens (11.8%) than on military troops (5.2%).⁴ This somewhat lesser emphasis on troops likely reflects the greater ambiguity of their value in discourse: Whereas foreign leaders provide presidents a specific individual by which to identify a nation, and citizens provide a broader, symbolic representation, troops provide neither. They are more bound to the nation’s political system than are citizens, but they are less specific as a marker of national identity than is the nation’s

³ Texts of presidential speeches, from which all quotations and analyses are drawn, were retrieved from the National Archives’ *Public Papers of the Presidents*, the definitive record of presidential communications. (Available online at: www.americanpresidency.org)

⁴ The percentages discussed in this paragraph do not add up to 100% due to 10 instances where both citizens and leaders were mentioned in a single reference (e.g., “the *rulers* of many of the great *populations* in Europe”).

leader. It is not altogether surprising, then, that presidents have focused less attention on foreign troops than on leaders and citizens.

The presence of people in foreign-focused discourse has not been stable over time, but rather has waxed and waned. Figure 1 shows the percentage of leaders, troops, and citizens in presidential discourse across the eight decades considered here, with the darkest line showing the combined presence of all three groups. As the figure makes clear, there was a decline in presidential emphasis on foreigners in general from the 1930s to the 1970s, at which point the trend reversed, ultimately exceeding in the 2000s the previous high of the 1930s. The severity of these changes over time is quite striking ($\chi^2(7) = 98.725$, $p < .001$). During the 1970s, presidents referenced people in only 16.5% of their mentions of foreign entities. By the 2000s, this emphasis had nearly tripled, jumping to 43%. The individual group trends shown in the figure reveal that this broader pattern was driven primarily by the two most prominent groups: leaders and citizens. Both groups followed this general trend, with citizens especially emphasized early on, and with leaders especially emphasized in recent years. These trends show quite clearly that, in some eras, people have been more central to presidents' foreign-focused discourse than they have been in others, suggesting that their role in the identity construction process is subject to change with different circumstances.



Figure 1. Foreign-focused Discourse Including Citizens, Leaders, and Troops, by Decade.

What drives these sharp differences? In large part, it seems to be the different wartime contexts: World War II early on, then the Cold War, and finally the post-Cold War period (highlighted first by the Persian Gulf War, and then by wars in Afghanistan and Iraq). In the 1930s and 1940s, Hitler and Mussolini provided highly identifiable leaders that U.S. presidents could specifically point to when urging U.S. action (e.g., “Hitler will try again to breed mistrust and suspicion”—Roosevelt, 1942). In turn, this context provided a host of U.S. allies whose people could be praised (e.g., “We are fighting on the same side as the brave people of China”—Roosevelt, 1942). During the Cold War, however, with its more nebulous parameters, allied and enemy forces were talked about in much broader terms. Typically, presidents referred not to people, but rather to the nations that were, or had been, sites of combat (e.g., “[O]ur sons no longer die on the distant mountains of Korea”—Eisenhower, 1954; “Our nation tonight is engaged in a brutal and bitter conflict in Vietnam”—Johnson, 1966). Since the end of the Cold War, two major U.S. conflicts have had an easily identifiable leader: Saddam Hussein. As presidents cast Hussein in negative terms, it increased the need to differentiate him from the citizens he governed, which in turn contributed to an increased number of references to people.

Importantly, presidents can position people in different roles: participants in the world order, dissenters from it, or victims of it. Figure 2 explores the roles that presidents have assigned to foreign leaders, troops, and citizens. Several trends are apparent. First, foreign troops and citizens are usually positioned as participants in the world order, and are put in this role significantly more often than leaders ($\chi^2(2) = 34.36, p < .001$). Whereas troops and citizens are each positioned as participants roughly 70% of the time, leaders are put in this role less than half the time. Individual leaders, in other words, are presented as less effective participants in the world order than are groups of people. This is largely because leaders are much more often positioned as dissenters from the world order than the other two groups are ($\chi^2(2) = 144.46, p < .001$)—a second trend apparent in Figure 2. Specifically, leaders are positioned this way 48.8% of the time, making it their dominant role. Troops find themselves in this role 25% of the time, and citizens only 4%. Whether positioning these entities as participants or dissenters, presidents have recognized that foreign leaders have had direct roles in determining the actions that nations would take, whereas citizens have just been following along (e.g., “I hope to explore with the Polish government the possibility of using our frozen Polish funds on projects of peace that will demonstrate our abiding friendship for and interest in the people of Poland” – Kennedy, 1961).

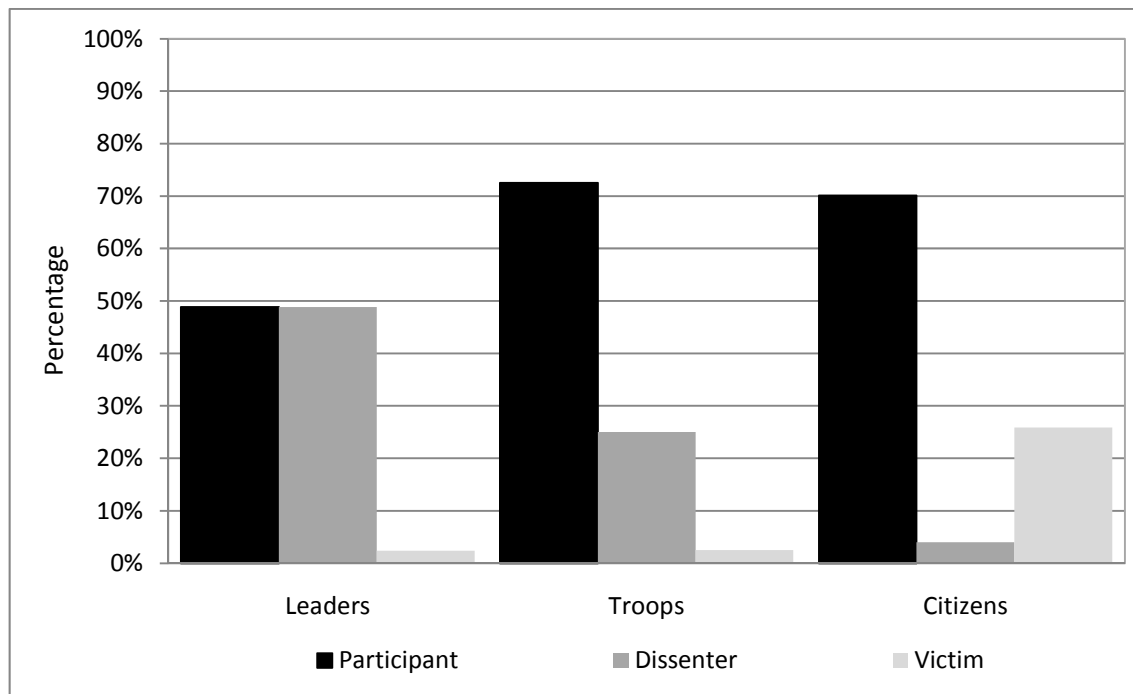


Figure 2. Roles Assigned to Leaders, Troops, and Citizens in Foreign-focused Discourse.

These patterns thus begin to reveal a logic in presidential discourse: Those most responsible for the nation's role in the world order—leaders—are held most accountable when that role is frowned upon. Troops, who, in some cases, facilitate this role militarily, are next in line. Citizens, however, are very rarely positioned in this way. This logic becomes even more evident when looking at the final trend apparent in Figure 2: the assignment of people to victim status. Foreign leaders and troops are essentially never positioned as victims—both appear in this role only 2.5% of the time. In contrast, citizens appear in this role fully one-quarter of the time, significantly more than the other two groups ($\chi^2(2) = 86.45, p < .001$). As far as presidential discourse is concerned, it is nearly impossible for leaders or troops to be victims; that role is reserved for citizens. This, again, seems to reflect the different level of accountability assigned to these three groups. Leaders and troops, presidents may feel, are somewhat responsible for any victimization a nation might face. Citizens, conversely, are more often objects of sympathy—viewed as guiltless and in need of U.S. support. Two examples help to illustrate this trend. In 1952, Harry Truman offered this perspective:

In Asia the new Communist empire is a daily threat to millions of people. The peoples of Asia want to be free to follow their own way of life. They want to preserve their culture and their traditions against communism, just as much as we want to preserve ours. They are laboring under terrific handicaps . . . We can and we must increase our help to them.

And in 2003, George W. Bush put it this way:

The dictator who is assembling the world's most dangerous weapons has already used them on whole villages, leaving thousands of his own citizens dead, blind, or disfigured. . . . And tonight I have a message for the brave and oppressed people of Iraq: Your enemy is not surrounding your country; your enemy is ruling your country. And the day he and his regime are removed from power will be the day of your liberation.

Clearly, presidents find the victimization of citizens an especially useful rhetorical strategy to draw out emotion—particularly sympathy—and to urge the American people to support a specific foreign policy objective.

The natures of the very different roles that leaders and citizens play in presidential discourse are drawn into sharp relief by comparing them to the roles that foreign entities are placed in when people are *not* included in the references. In those 1,657 instances, foreign entities are dissenters 24.3% of the time, victims 10.0% of the time, and participants in the rest of the mentions. Adding people to presidents' foreign-focused discourse noticeably changes the international roles that are presented. As we have seen, when citizens are involved, the victim role accounts for more than a quarter of presidents' foreign mentions. When leaders are present, they are dissenters roughly half the time. In other words, including a reference to a citizen more than doubles the likelihood that a president will talk about a foreign entity as a victim, whereas including a reference to a leader more than doubles the likelihood that a president will talk about a foreign entity as a dissenter. Thus, when *people* enter presidential discourse, the international community that Americans are asked to imagine looks very different.

Groups of people are also assigned different tones in presidential discourse. People are sometimes viewed positively and sometimes negatively, with other mentions having no clear evaluative component. Figure 3 shows which of these tones presidents assigned to foreign leaders, troops, and citizens. One general trend stands out: Citizens are presented in the most positive terms, leaders the most negative, and troops the most neutral. Indeed, citizens are usually talked about in positive terms (54.4% of mentions), whereas leaders (33.2%) and troops (29.2%) are not ($\chi^2(2) = 34.46, p < .001$). On the other hand, negative mentions of leaders (45.7%) are much more common than are such mentions of troops (20.8%) and citizens (13.1%) ($\chi^2(2) = 77.4, p < .001$). Troops typically are talked about in neutral terms. It is clear, then, that presidents target the most negative of their foreign-focused discourse at leaders, but look for opportunities to praise citizens. Again, a few examples help to illustrate these patterns.

In 1942, Franklin Roosevelt praised the citizens of Great Britain and Russia:

[W]e are fighting on the same side with the British people, who . . . withstood the enemy with fortitude and tenacity. . . . We are fighting on the same side with the Russian people . . . who with almost superhuman will and courage have forced the invaders back.

Ronald Reagan, in 1987, offered a similar sentiment:

Today the brave people of Afghanistan are showing that resolve. The Soviet Union says it wants a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan, yet it continues a brutal war and props up a regime whose days are clearly numbered. We are ready to support a political solution that guarantees . . . genuine self-determination for the Afghan people.

And in his final State of the Union address, in 2008, George W. Bush drew a sharp distinction between leaders and citizens:

We're also standing against the forces of extremism embodied by the regime in Tehran. Iran's rulers oppress a good and talented people. And wherever freedom advances in the Middle East, it seems the Iranian regime is there to oppose it.

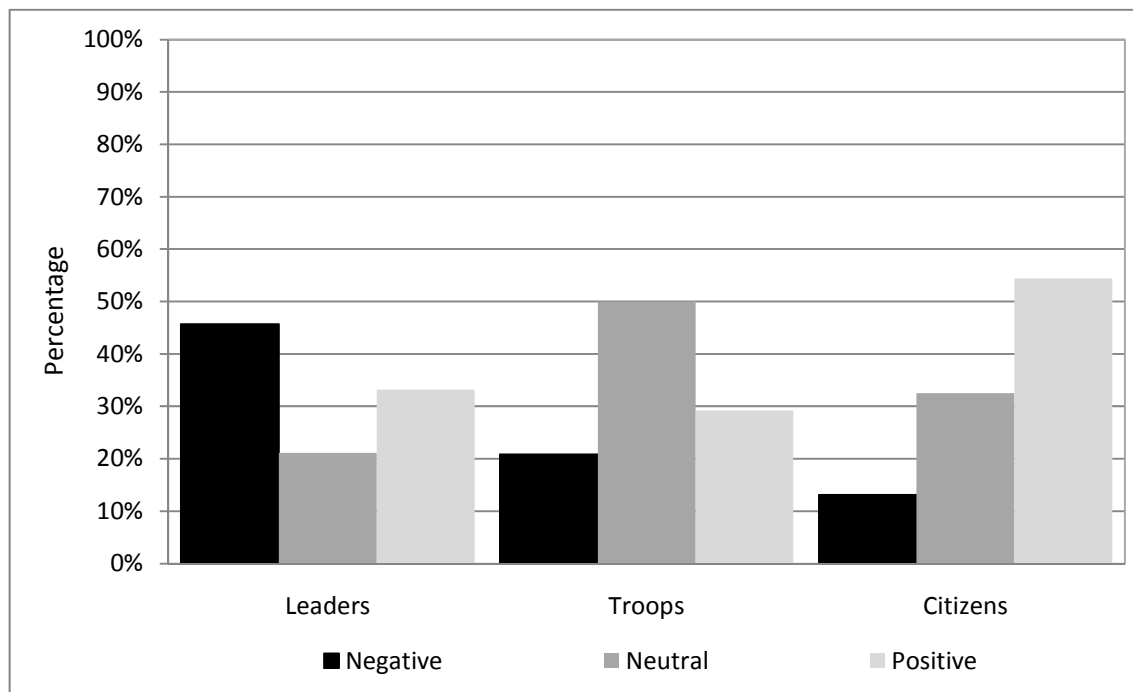


Figure 3. Tone Assigned to Leaders, Troops, and Citizens in Foreign-focused Discourse.

These trends and examples illustrate that a person's role in presidential discourse is tied to the tone with which they are likely to be discussed. One would expect that those dissenting from the world order would usually be talked about in negative terms, but that those participating in it would garner more positive mentions. Indeed, this is often the case; the Cramer's V correlation between role and tone is .56 ($n = 2,330, p < .001$). What is particularly notable about this relationship, however, is that it is strongest for leaders (.66), somewhat weaker for troops (.61), and weakest for citizens (.53). Thus, the more a

person is tied to a nation's political system, the more their role in the world order defines the tone with which they will be talked about by U.S. presidents. Whereas leaders are strongly bound by their role, citizens have slightly more freedom. Even citizens who are positioned as dissenters, for example, can sometimes avoid an explicit condemnation from presidents. Leaders put in this role are less likely to do so. Once again, foreign citizens are positioned more favorably in presidential discourse than are leaders or troops.

Figure 4 further clarifies the tone that has been assigned to leaders and citizens over time. It shows the mean tone assigned to these groups, by decade, when a positive mention is assigned a value of 1, a neutral mention a value of 0, and a negative mention a value of -1. Therefore, points above the horizontal axis (values ranging from 0 to 1) indicate that mentions during the decade were generally positive, whereas points below the axis (values ranging from 0 to -1) indicate that mentions were generally negative. As the figure makes clear, presidents have consistently talked about citizens in positive terms (averaging .41). Slight drops in tone occurred in the 1960s and 1980s, owing mostly to neutral mentions of citizens living in then-dissenter areas, such as North Vietnam and the Soviet Union (e.g., "Tonight, I want to speak to the people of the Soviet Union, to tell them it's true that our governments have had serious differences"—Reagan, 1984). Leaders, conversely, have averaged a slightly negative tone in presidential discourse (-.12), but they have also displayed wide variation over time, ranging from a low of -.38 in the 1950s to a high of .53 in the 1960s. Presidents assigned a primarily negative tone to leaders in just two decades, the 1950s and 2000s. The former primarily targeted leaders of the Soviet Union, while the latter focused on Saddam Hussein. These two decades were also the periods during which there existed the largest discrepancy between the tone assigned to citizens and leaders (.84 in the 1950s, .72 in the 2000s). The 1940s (.46) were also high in this regard.



Figure 4. Tone Assigned to Leaders and Citizens in Foreign-focused Discourse, by Decade.

It appears, then, that presidents governing during times of substantial conflict and upheaval in the global environment—World War II in the 1940s, the dawn of the Cold War in the 1950s, and the War on Terror in the 2000s—seek to differentiate citizens, whose support they might desire, from the leaders with whom they are struggling. Such differentiation is consistent with the “just war” doctrine (see Elshtain, 1991), which holds war to be justifiable under specific conditions and for certain reasons, one of which is that reasonable measures must be undertaken to spare the lives of innocent civilians. Presidents often follow this model rhetorically, presenting their cause as necessary to vanquish an evil leader so that citizens might live free of tyranny. This approach also provides presidents with a more achievable goal: If the war is about removing a certain leader, its end point is clear and—in theory, at least—attainable. Such distinctions are more easily drawn when a clearly identifiable leader is present, a condition not always met in an era of “post realism” (see Beer & Hariman, 1996; Winkler, 2006). Notably, these trends also illustrate that foreign leaders today are finding it increasingly difficult to measure up to their citizens, at least in the eyes of U.S. presidents: Since peaking in the 1960s, world leaders have been talked about with a more negative tone in each passing decade.

We also considered the extent to which presidents hold up the people of other nations as exemplars from whom Americans might learn. We have seen already that presidents are willing to praise

the citizens of other nations in general terms, identifying them as brave or tenacious or talented. It is one thing to speak in these broad terms, however, and quite another to explicitly state that someone is worth emulating. It turns out that presidents have been extremely hesitant to use such explicit language in their State of the Union addresses. In fact, only *one time* in the 2,330 mentions of foreign entities that have been made over the last eight decades did a president hold up another nation's people as an example for Americans to follow. It came in 1942, when Franklin Roosevelt recalled the example set by the people of London to encourage those at home to remain determined in the war effort: "No matter what our enemies, in their desperation, may attempt to do to us—we will say, as the people of London have said, 'We can take it.'" In no other instance did a president make such a statement. Clearly, presidents have been willing to praise foreign people, but, consistent with the expectations of American exceptionalism, they have stopped short of explicitly stating that those worthy of praise are also worthy of emulation.

Additional Analysis: Barack Obama's 2010 State of the Union

We undertook some additional analysis to determine where Barack Obama fits into these patterns. Focusing on his 2010 State of the Union address, we discuss three trends that differentiate Obama from previous presidents.

First, in this speech, Obama continued the trend of the 1990s and 2000s by emphasizing foreigners in his discourse; more than a third of his references to foreign entities were devoted to citizens, leaders, and troops. What is noteworthy, however, is that his focus on citizens was higher than the pattern of any previous decade (more than a fourth of his mentions of foreign entities referenced citizens). In Obama's case, foreign citizens had a considerably higher share in the identity construction process than did leaders or troops, which he referenced infrequently. One could argue that, by mentioning foreign citizens more often than his predecessors had, Obama provided Americans the opportunity to better identify with a foreign nation's citizens. This idea is supported by the specificity with which Obama referenced citizens. Whereas previous presidents often spoke in general terms about "the people" of a given nation, Obama used hypothetical, but specific, examples (e.g., "the girl who yearns to go to school in Afghanistan," or "the young man denied a job by corruption in Guinea"). Social identity theory suggests that we identify with those most like us. By using such concrete examples, Obama may have encouraged Americans to view foreign citizens as similar to themselves.

Interestingly, even as Obama referenced foreign citizens more often and more specifically than his predecessors had, he was hesitant to offer much direct praise of these people. Instead, most of his references were neutral (e.g., "We are responsibly leaving Iraq to its people," "We will . . . support the rights of all Afghans"). Unlike the rhetoric of some past presidents, especially that of his immediate predecessor, George W. Bush, Obama avoided descriptors such as "brave," "skilled," or "hardworking." This trend runs somewhat counter to the pattern described above, in that it might limit Americans' ability to feel connected to those abroad. It may be consistent, however, with the rational and sober tone Obama often adopts in speeches—an approach that has drawn its share of criticism (Williamson, 2009; Zuckerman, 2010). Regardless, this trend should be interpreted with caution, as Obama's popularity abroad suggests that many of his other public communications do not follow this same approach.

Finally, Obama's 2010 State of the Union was similar to past presidents' in that he did not explicitly hold up foreign citizens as exemplars from which Americans might learn. However, he differed dramatically from his predecessors in his willingness to hold up other *nations* as exemplars. Consider the following example, where Obama mentioned three nations that might serve as models for U.S. development:

Washington has been telling us to wait for decades, even as the problems have grown worse. Meanwhile, China's not waiting to revamp its economy. Germany's not waiting. India's not waiting. These nations are—they're not standing still. These nations aren't playing for second place. They're putting more emphasis on math and science. They're rebuilding their infrastructure. They're making serious investments in clean energy because they want those jobs.

In the eight decades of State of the Union messages prior to Obama's, presidents had only *three times* held up foreign nations or people as exemplars that should be followed (the citizens exemplar discussed above, plus two instances of nations as exemplars). Obama equaled that total in a single passage in his first State of the Union address. If this pattern holds, Obama will be setting a very different course for America's "international identity" than any modern president who came before (see Coe & Neumann, in press).

Discussion

This article seeks to illuminate the diverse roles that foreigners play in the discursive construction of American national identity. The results make clear that most of presidents' foreign-focused discourse—nearly three-quarters, in fact—does not mention people at all. This is consistent with the idea that presidents' foreign policy rhetoric is often abstract, rather than specific (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008; Wander, 1984). To mention people requires of presidents a greater degree of specificity than does mentioning nations, and such specifics might often be deemed cumbersome or unnecessary. However, because our identities are dependent largely on our perceptions of others (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1987), to exclude foreigners from U.S. citizens' ken is essentially to alter citizens' sense of self. If foreign *people* are rarely mentioned in political discourse, circulated in news coverage, or discussed in everyday conversations, they have almost no bearing on how Americans understand their place in the world. Our findings show that, in the context of the American presidency, this is the typical fate of most of the world's people.

With that said, the percentage of presidents' foreign-focused discourse that does mention people has been rising over the past few decades, and it is currently at its highest point since at least 1930. When presidents make people a focus of their discourse in this way, they pay the most attention to leaders and citizens, and they envision for these two groups very different roles in the world order. Leaders are more likely to be dissenters, whereas citizens are more likely to be participants. Similarly, leaders are more likely to be talked about in negative terms (and increasingly so since the 1960s), while citizens are more likely to be talked about in positive terms. These trends in presidential discourse seem to reflect a rhetorical strategy aimed at both justifying specific foreign policy aims and establishing a bond

between Americans and foreign citizens. The latter is often necessary to accomplish the former. For example, in George W. Bush's 2002 State of the Union address—delivered just a few months after the first U.S. military strikes against Afghanistan's then-leaders, the Taliban—he announced that “America and Afghanistan are now allies against terror.” Bush's optimistic message was possible because of the citizens/leaders distinction identified herein: With the (bad) leaders now gone, the (good) citizens of Afghanistan (as well as the new leadership) can assume their rightful position in the world order.

The differential treatment of different groups of foreigners in presidential discourse appears to hinge primarily on accountability: A specific individual leading a nation can easily be held accountable for any dissenting acts that threaten the world order or, in particular, U.S. interests. Troops can also be identified as a single entity and, sometimes, tied directly to specific acts of which the United States disapproves. Citizens, however, can be held accountable only in very limited ways (e.g., if they elect and continue to support a leader who dissents from the world order). Thus, it seems illogical to chastise citizens for the deeds of their nation. The result is that presidents have reserved most of their criticism for specific leaders—the evil “others” discussed in prior studies—whereas citizens have generally been praised. That presidents draw such a distinction is perhaps expected in modern U.S. society, but its importance should not be overlooked. Consider the opposite approach, which would hold citizens accountable for the deeds of those who lead them. This is the vision that, in extreme cases, allows terrorists to claim that their attacks on innocent civilians are justified. U.S. presidents' willingness to draw sharp contrasts between foreign leaders and citizens has made their approach to foreign policy more reasonable, and their justifications for war more consistent with the “just war” doctrine (see Elshtain, 1991). Indeed, presidents have made a concerted effort *not* to denigrate foreign citizens. Even in the rare cases where many citizens of a given nation have well-documented disdain for the United States despite their leaders counting themselves as U.S. allies (recently, for example, Turkey, Egypt, and Pakistan; see Pew Research Center, 2010), presidents have either avoided specifically mentioning the people or have lavished praise upon them, perhaps in an attempt to turn the tide.

Notably, citizens are unique in presidential speech, in that they are regularly positioned in a role that leaders and troops are almost never assigned to: the victim. In nations with which the United States has recently had overt conflict (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran), citizens have been the focus of considerable presidential attention, nearly all of it making the case that these people are sympathetic victims of tyrannical leaders. Along with likely bolstering U.S. foreign policy aims, as described above, this rhetoric also has important implications for identity formation. As presidents portray citizens as the victim, they are quick to emphasize ostensible commonalities between people at home and abroad—an inherent right to self-government, for instance, or a strong desire to live in peace. Social identity theory suggests that people define themselves to some degree based on those with whom they are most similar. Thus, as presidents “constitute” foreigners in this way, opportunities are provided for Americans to both see themselves in others and develop bonds they might otherwise ignore. As a result, even as people in the United States might rightly look down on some of the world's more tyrannical leaders, they may retain a willingness to view all citizens of the world as fundamentally equal. Such a belief could support or reflect an increased desire for the nation to be active in world affairs—a feeling that is on the rise among Americans (Pew Research Center, 2009).

Importantly, the feel-good relationship that presidents present between U.S. citizens and people in other nations stops short of stating that Americans might learn from those abroad. Our evidence reveals that modern presidents have almost never explicitly positioned foreigners as exemplars from whom Americans might learn. The pattern is striking: Across 12 presidents and 683 mentions of foreign people, *only once* did a president look abroad for an exemplar. This is consistent with the notion of "American exceptionalism," the idea that the United States views itself as fundamentally different from other nations (Lipset, 1996; Shafer, 1991). This trend may be changing, however. Barack Obama's first State of the Union did not reference citizens as exemplars, but it did mention three specific nations whose lead America might follow. If Obama continues this trend, U.S. national identity might end up being broader and more inclusive than it has been thus far.

This initial examination has focused on the discourse side of the identity construction process, and future scholarship would do well to continue these inquiries with an extended range of communications. News coverage—which circulates widely and therefore has a significant role in identity construction—and the speeches of foreign leaders—which might reveal a wide range of approaches to identity construction—would be particularly fruitful avenues. Ultimately, a more complete picture will require that scholars examine public attitudes, as well. Such research will usefully expand our understanding of how leaders and citizens interact to build national identity.

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