

The term ‘identity politics’ has been a buzzword in the political spotlight, especially in the wake of the 2016 election. Many critics claim that they are harmful, that politicians must appeal to a broad base, rather than specific minority groups, in order to effectively win elections and eventually lead. However, the rate of minority leadership in all sectors is increasing, and these leaders find it difficult not to draw from their own identity, inherently empowering groups that were previously shut out. This summer, I expanded my research to explore these themes of identity in the State Department by analyzing how certain Secretaries of States’ identity affects their rhetoric. I was most interested in how the female secretaries differed in their treatment of women’s rights compared to their male counterpart. This is a large question, and one that I plan on exploring for my honors thesis. Thus, the goal of the summer was to figure out methodology for my larger project.

In order to complete this research goal, I built off of and expanded the text analysis tool that I built last summer, along with Professor Janet Martin and Gibbons Research Fellow Katherine Henneberger. Last summer, we compiled a database of every speech given by Secretaries of States dating back to 1993. However, due to time constrictions, the high volume of speeches, and the time consuming process of entering and tagging speeches, we were only able to enter and analyze the first six months of each secretary’s tenure. This summer, in order to analyze a higher volume of speeches, I spent the first two weeks of my fellowship figuring out a more efficient way of entering speeches. Realizing that finishing the old database was unfeasible—entering the remaining three years of each secretary’s tenure would take approximately a year—I decided to compile an entirely new database. The new database was different in several key ways, all of which facilitated quicker data entry. The first major change was that I compiled the new database in NVivo Pro. NVivo Pro has far more advanced analyzation tools than regular NVivo, tools which were necessary for our new research goals and allowed for quicker data entry. Another change was that I began to enter the speeches in one month chunks, rather than individually. With these two changes, the remaining data input only took two days.

Once I had a database of all of the secretaries’ speeches dating back to 1993, I began my analyzation. Before analyzing the larger issue of gender, I began with a smaller, ‘test’ topic—slavery. Using NVivo Pro’s text query feature, I coded every mention of slavery within the secretaries’ speeches, differentiating between foreign and domestic contexts. I found that that the two black secretaries—Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice—were far more likely to mention the United State’s own history of slavery, while the other six secretaries usually only mentioned slavery abroad, often within the context of human trafficking. Additionally, often times the two black secretaries, especially Rice, directly referred to their own identity and backgrounds while discussing slavery, using phrases like “my ancestors.” This demonstrates that Powell and Rice’s identity as black Americans increased their likelihood to address the issue of slavery. Thus, I formed a hypothesis: that the female secretaries will address women’s rights more often than male secretaries.

Moving forward, I will pick several themes and determine how female and male secretaries address those themes differently. Neglecting women’s rights means neglecting half of the world’s population, and seriously hindering economic and social progress. Thus, if my hypothesis is correct, my project will demonstrate the importance of female leadership in the state department in the future.