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Name

Alice Volfson

Title of Paper

“Civic Religion” and the end of the Cold War: a quantitative analysis

Class Year

Senior

Date Research Undertaken

Fall 2022

Citation Style Used

MLA

Affiliated Course

GOV 493C

Faculty Name

Professor Maryanne Borrelli

Student Major

Slavic Studies and Government double-major

Narrative Questions

- 1. Describe how you came to choose your topic, specifically noting any pre-research that you did. What sources did you use in this pre-research? To what extent did you consult with librarians, faculty, or others? How did this pre-research lead you to your topic?**

During the fall semester of my senior year, I took Professor Borrelli's Political Speech class as my senior government seminar. While I expected the class to analyze speechwriting through the lens of campaigning, the class turned out to be completely different. Instead, the research-focused seminar analyzed presidential speech through persuasion techniques and rhetoric. In class, we discussed elements of speech (ethos/pathos/logos, gendered language, speech in times of crisis, military speech) and applied these elements to case studies. For the research portion, Professor Borrelli instructed us to develop a portfolio based on one study of speech. I chose to focus on Ronald Reagan's political rhetoric toward Communism through the lens of religion. When I stepped on campus four years ago, I knew I wanted to be a Government major. After working in politics for several years, I wanted to pursue a career in public service. I did not anticipate the common freshman-year identity crisis that led me to declare a double major in the Slavic Studies and Government departments. My need to explore my family history was the deciding factor for this academic decision. I am a first-generation American; my parents were born in the Soviet Union, and I grew up in a mixed-culture household. Typical household conversations about presidents and policy would occur in Russian, including discussing Cold War propaganda. Having grown up in the Soviet Union, My parents had a very different understanding of and perspectives on the Cold War and the politicians involved. Due to my upbringing in such an environment, even my interests in politics and American government were intertwined with a foreign perspective. So, four years later, when Professor Borrelli asked what I was thinking about focusing on for my portfolio, I decided to combine my shared interests in Soviet history and American political science and focus on Ronald Reagan's anti-Communist political speech. I wanted to approach this topic from a perspective I had not explored before. My overarching theme for the three papers and oral presentation centered around Reagan's exploitation of religious rhetoric as political manipulation. The first paper I wrote for the portfolio was a qualitative analysis of a speech Reagan gave in 1983 in Orlando, Florida. Dubbed by Winston Churchill as the speech which "ended the Cold War," Reagan used religious imagery to juxtapose the immortality of Soviet Communism with the almost sacred goodness of the United States. Using this binary of good and bad, Reagan declared the Soviet Union the "Evil Empire." For this paper, I relied heavily on the American Presidency Project to find the speech I wanted to focus on, as well as WorldCat and OneSearch, which provided many peer-reviewed articles on religion and military policy, and persuasion. The second paper, which this application focuses on, was a qualitative-based analysis of my topic. As a humanities scholar, I struggled to craft my argument and logic. I could not understand how to link data science and an argument about religious manipulation. I wanted to use numerical data on word frequency to prove that Reagan used religion to advance Cold War policy. However, I needed help figuring out how to collect or showcase this data concisely and meaningfully. I met with Professor Borrelli, who guided me through narrowing my topic. A few days later, I was working at my campus job at the Shain Library circulation desk. I talked to Emily

Aylward about my troubles crafting an argument and showcasing my data. She called Andrew Lopez from the reference desk to see if he could assist me. From our conversation, I was able to realize my project, and start the research process.

2. Describe your process of finding information for your project. Note specifically the tools you used to undertake your research, as well as the specific search strategies you used within these tools. (Note: “Ebsco,” being an umbrella vendor, is not a specific enough response when identifying tools; listing the “library database” is also an unacceptably vague answer. Specific tools include JSTOR, America: History & Life, Web of Science, etc., along with OneSearch, the new library system.)

Similarly to the first paper in the portfolio, my research journey started with the American Presidency Project, which I accessed through the library databases. While crafting my research, I had to choose which words to focus on to track word frequency. Because of my focus on religious rhetoric, I decided to use words that would yield connections to the Soviet Union, the United States, and religion based on the research I had done in the previous paper. I ended up choosing “God,” “Soviet Union,” “moral,” “freedom,” and “Communist.” From here, I could input these terms in quotations and with specific capitalization into the search of the American Presidency Project. Selecting Ronald Reagan as the president and filtering only spoken remarks, I could see which speeches contained all five key terms. The search yielded eleven total speeches which contained all of these words. From there, I could use the “CTRL-F” function to count the frequency of keyword usage per speech. It was with this information that I met with Andrew Lopez. After discussing my ideas for the project, he directed me to a library database called Voyant Tools. Voyant Tools enabled me to build visual representations of word frequency. I started with copying-and-pasting the URLs of all eleven speeches separately into the software. There are over a dozen functions on the software, but after some exploration, I realized that the best way to structure my paper was to base it on word associations. Voyant Tools has a function that allows one to build bubble and line graphs that track the association made from my keywords to other words in the eleven speeches. For example, the graph for the term “Communist” showed me which words appeared most commonly before and after the keyword and connected them visually. From here, I could track the negative, positive, or neutral association of the words connected to the key terms and develop an argument. Afterwards, I expanded my list of key terms by including subsets of terms associated with, in particular, proxy wars and nuclear functions. Andrew Lopez graciously allowed me to check out a book from the reference desk entitled *Chronological History of United States Foreign Relations: 1932-1988* by Lester Brune. He recommended that, for the analytical aspect of my project, I compare the frequency of specific keywords with major political events connected with my project. For example, if military terms such as “Nuclear” increased during one speech, I used this book to see what major events happened before, during, and after the presidential address. Using this, I could track motivating factors for the usage of this term and whether Reagan’s speech had trackable effects on policy shifts. After collecting all this data, I incorporated a section of my paper that paved the way for future research. I aimed to compare Reagan’s Cold War rhetoric to those of other Cold War Presidents, from John F. Kennedy to George H.W. Bush. I followed the same process of using the American Presidency Project to locate the number of speeches in which keywords are used and the frequency of usage within those speeches. From there, I converted the count into percentages and compared them against the data for Reagan. Using this, I formulated ideas and hypotheses for further study. In addition to finding

methods to support my quantitative elements, I backed up my analytical and hypothetical evidence using WorldCat, OneSearch, and primarily Political Science Complete (also recommended by Andrew Lopez) by finding peer-reviewed articles on topics such as religious rhetoric, civil religion, the fall of Communism, and the communication tactics of Ronald Reagan. Political Science Complete was a new library database I had not previously explored. With the guidance of Andrew Lopez, I plugged in different keywords to find peer-reviewed articles. For example, "Ronald Reagan Religion," "Ronald Reagan Communism," "Ronald Reagan Moral," and "Ronald Reagan God" were all searches that yielded preferable results.

3. Describe your process of evaluating the resources you found. How did you make decisions about which resources you would use, and which you wouldn't? What kinds of questions did you ask yourself about resources in order to determine whether they were worthy of inclusion?

As I mentioned, Voyant Tools has over a dozen different functions that can be used for quantitative analysis. It took trial and error to determine which process served my purposes best. For example, there was an option of a Cirrus Word Cloud, which appealed to me as a visual representation of which words appeared the most frequently in my speeches. There was a graph that had each word in the document alongside its frequency count. There was another graph for key terms and their collections which piqued my interest. There were over ten visual diagrams for word association, frequency, and collocations. There were apparent functions that did not serve my purpose, such as an illustration of words on the map of the world, a trend graph, and a "Stream-Graph." In over an hour of exploration of Voyant Tools, I do not believe that I exhausted my options. Therefore, in the interest of time, I had to focus on using only one function, Voyant Tools, offered and use it consistently throughout my project. From this, I settled on using the "Links Graph," a subset of "Visualization Tools." As mentioned previously, this offered a bubble-line graph showing correlated terms. Additionally, I had to cut back on the amount of background research I did. Because this was a qualitative analysis, most of my evidence had to come from the graphs and tables I would provide. This meant shifting focus to Voyant Tools instead of scholarly articles. This was not something I was used to, so when I was researching Political Science Complete, I had to place greater scrutiny on the importance and relevance of each article. This meant asking myself if the research I was doing was adding toward qualitative analysis (which I did not need) or whether it was the research that would back up my quantitative analysis. The questions that my research was attempting to answer were "Was this conflation of American goodness and religious nature a form of anti-Soviet 'soft power'? Was this 'civic religion' present in speeches throughout all of Reagan's two terms? Additionally, how did these remarks fit into the full scope of his presidency, and how much did they contribute to his 'winning' the Cold War?" In the process of evaluating and combing through my research and evidence, I was focused on constructing the best argument to support my hypothesis. I had anticipated finding "that Reagan consistently used this conflation to advance his rhetoric and that his religious background played an essential part in his foreign policy dealings with the Soviet Union." Therefore, with this hypothesis in mind, the construction of frequency tables, bubble-line graphs, and correlations with events had to not only answer my questions but uphold my hypothesis. This also played a central role in evaluating Voyant Tools' functions, peer-reviewed articles, and my structuring of found evidence.