

THE ISSUES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN AMERICAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

ABSTRACT

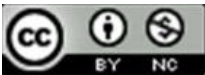
The article discusses the main issues of national identity in American political discourse on the basis of analysis of the inaugural addresses of the American presidents. It has been shown that American presidents' inaugural speeches are rooted in traditional American civic and moral values, particularly emphasizing liberty, democracy, equality, justice and unity as traits of national identity. These themes serve as both a call to action and a reaffirmation of enduring national principles, traits and values of the American people. It has also been shown that the significance attributed to different traits of national identity can change depending on political, economic, social and other factors. In this regard, the article examines the different interpretations of national identity used by American presidents in their inaugural addresses, the speech strategies and tactics of its construction and expression.

Key words: *national identity, culture, traditions, values, political discourse, speech strategies and tactics*

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Հողվածում քննարկվում են ամերիկյան քաղաքական խոսույթում ազգային ինքնության հիմնական հարցերը՝ հիմնվելով ամերիկացի նախագահների երդմնակալության ելույթների վերլուծության վրա: Ցույց է տրված, որ ամերիկացի նախագահների երդմնակալության ելույթները արմատավորված են ամերիկյան ավանդական քաղաքացիական և բարոյական արժեքներում, մասնավորապես՝ ընդգծելով միասնությունը, ազատությունը, ժողովրդավարությունը, հավասարությունը և արդարությունը ընդպես ազգային ինքնության հատկանիշներ: Այս թեմաները ծառայում են որպես գործողության կոչ, ինչպես նաև ամերիկյան ժողովրդի անսասան ազգային սկզբունքների, հատկանիշների և արժեքների վերահաստատում: Նաև ցույց է տրվել, որ ազգային ինքնության տարբեր հատկանիշներին վերագրվող նշանակությունը կարող է փոխվել կախված քաղաքական, տնտեսական, սոցիալական և այլ գործոններից: Այս առումով, հողվածում քննության են առնվում ամերիկյան նախագահների կողմից նրանց երդմնակալության ելույթներում օգտագործված ազգային ինքնության տարբեր մեկնաբանությունները, դրա կառուցման և արտահայտման խոսքային ռազմավարություններն ու մարտավարությունները:

Բանալի բաներ՝ ազգային ինքնություն, մշակույթ, ավանդույթներ, արժեքներ, քաղաքական խոսույթ, խոսքային ռազմավարություններ և մարտավարություններ

РЕЗЮМЕ ВОПРОСЫ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В АМЕРИКАНСКОМ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОМ ДИСКУРСЕ

В статье рассматриваются основные вопросы национальной идентичности в американском политическом дискурсе на основе анализа инаугурационных речей американских президентов. Показано, что инаугурационные речи американских президентов укоренены в традиционных американских гражданских и моральных ценностях, особенно подчеркивая свободу, демократию, равенство, справедливость и единство как черты национальной идентичности. Эти темы служат как призывом к действию, так и подтверждением непреходящих национальных принципов, черт и ценностей

американского народа. Также показано, что значимость, придаваемая различным чертам национальной идентичности, может меняться в зависимости от политических, экономических, социальных и других факторов. В этой связи рассматриваются используемые американскими президентами в их инаугурационных обращениях разные интерпретации национальной идентичности, речевые стратегии и тактики ее конструирования и выражения.

Ключевые слова: *национальная идентичность, культура, традиции, ценности, политический дискурс, речевые стратегии и тактики*

The issue of national identity has recently become increasingly important due to the modern processes of globalization, which predetermine, on the one hand, the unification of cultures and levelling of cultural boundaries, and on the other, the desire for national identification, independence and sovereignty, recognition of national interests and values.

The issue of national identification is especially relevant for US, a multiethnic, multiracial and multicultural society in which different national, racial, religious and cultural groups coexist and contribute to the overall national identity.

In his book “Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity” Samuel Huntington examines the changes occurring in the salience and substance of American national identity as well as challenges to it. Speaking about the salience of American national identity, i.e. the importance that Americans attribute to their national identity compared to their many other identities, he argues that it has varied through history.

Among Americans national identity became preeminent compared to other identities only after the Civil War, and American nationalism flourished during the following century. In the 1960s, however, subnational, dual-national, and transnational identities began to rival and erode the preeminence of national identity. The tragic events of September 11 dramatically brought that identity back to the fore. “So long as Americans see their nation endangered, S. Huntington writes, they are likely to have a high sense of identity with it. If their perception of threat fades, other identities could again take precedence over national identity”.

Speaking about the substance of American identity, i.e. what Americans think they have in common and what distinguishes them from other peoples, Huntington notices that through the centuries Americans have, in varying degrees, defined the substance of their identity in terms of race, ethnicity, ideology, and culture. Race and ethnicity are now largely eliminated: Americans see their country as a multiethnic, multiracial society.

The “American Creed”, initially formulated by Thomas Jefferson and then elaborated by many others, is widely viewed as the crucial defining element of American identity. According to Huntington, the Creed, which includes the principles of liberty, democracy, equality and justice, was the product of the distinct Anglo-Protestant culture of the founding settlers of America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Key elements of that culture include: the English language; Christianity; religious commitment; English concepts of the rule of law, the

responsibility of rulers, and the rights of individuals; and dissenting Protestant values of individualism, the Protestant work ethic, and the belief that humans have the ability and the duty to try to create a heaven on earth, a “city on a hill”. Historically, millions of immigrants were attracted to America because of this culture and the economic opportunities it helped to make possible.

According to S. Huntington, Anglo-Protestant culture has been central to American identity for three centuries. It is what Americans have had in common and what has distinguished them from other peoples. But, as Huntington believes, in the late twentieth century, however, the salience and substance of this culture were challenged by a new wave of immigrants from Latin America and Asia, the popularity in intellectual and political circles of the doctrines of multiculturalism and diversity, the spread of Spanish as the second American language and the Hispanization trends in American society, the assertion of group identities based on race, ethnicity, and gender, the impact of diasporas and their homeland governments, and the growing commitment of elites to cosmopolitan and transnational identities.

Huntington believes that in order to address existing and future challenges Americans should recommit themselves to the Anglo-Protestant culture, traditions, and values that for three and a half centuries have been embraced by Americans of all races, ethnicities, and religions and that have been the source of their liberty, unity, power, prosperity, and moral leadership in the world. By saying this he underlines the importance of

Anglo-Protestant culture, not the importance of Anglo-Protestant people. He believes that one of the greatest achievements, or perhaps the greatest achievement, of America is the extent to which it has eliminated the racial and ethnic components that historically were central to its identity and has become a multiethnic, multiracial society in which individuals are to be judged on their merits (Huntington, 2004).

According to Shannon Anderson, over the course of the twentieth century, there have been three primary narratives of American national identity: the melting pot, Anglo-Protestantism, and cultural pluralism / multiculturalism. Each narrative employs specific linguistic strategies to construct and negotiate the boundaries of American identity

According to her, Anglo-Protestantism is a conservative – literally, not necessarily politically – vision of the US, a past-based national identity. It insists that America should be what it was. The ideology, then, is explicit, and normatively ascribes a proper sort of American identity. The melting pot, in stark contrast, suggests that what is American will always be fluid as newcomers continue to enter. The "melting pot" metaphor, popularized in the early 20th century, depicted America as a crucible where diverse immigrant cultures would blend into a single, unified national identity. The cultural pluralism narrative, emerging in the mid-20th century, acknowledges and celebrates the diversity of immigrant cultures within the United States. If Anglo-Protestantism looks back, she argues, and the melting pot forward, multiculturalism (salad bowl) is a presentist narrative

which also has an ideological bent. Here, the “should” relates to how people of differing cultures live in and govern a society together.

Anderson emphasizes that national identity is not static but is continually constructed and reconstructed through discourse. The language used by policymakers, scholars, and media figures plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of who belongs to the American national community. They try to define and redefine what it means to be “American”, often in ways that include some while excluding others (Anderson, 2016: 10-11).

Francis Fukuyama in his book “Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment” (2018), following the German philosopher Hegel, who argued that the struggle for recognition was the ultimate driver of human history, claims that demand for recognition of one's identity is a master concept that unifies much of what is going on in world politics today. The universal recognition in which the dignity of every human being is recognized and on which liberal democracy is based has been increasingly challenged by narrower forms of recognition based on nation, religion, sect, race, ethnicity, or gender, which have resulted in populist nationalism, including anti-immigrant populism and of white nationalism.

The success of identity politics utilized by populist leaders has its objective reasons. Many of their supporters feel they have been disregarded by the national elites. Rural people, who are the backbone of populist movements not just in the United States but in other countries, often believe that their traditional values are under severe threat by

cosmopolitan, city-based elites neglecting national values, rights and interests for the sake of political correctness in different spheres of human interaction, including race, gender, religion, migration, etc.

As F. Fukuyama argues, we cannot get away from identity or identity politics. Identity is a powerful moral idea that “focuses our natural demand for recognition of our dignity and gives us a language for expressing the resentments that arise when such recognition is not forthcoming” (Fukuyama, 2018: 163). But the type of identity politics increasingly practiced on both the left and the right is deeply problematic because it returns to understandings of identity based on fixed characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and religion, which divides, rather than unites people. In Fukuyama’s opinion, the rise of identity politics in modern liberal democracies is one of the chief threats that they face, and “unless we can work our way back to more universal understandings of human dignity, we will doom ourselves to continuing conflict” (Fukuyama, 2018: XVI).

Vanessa B. Beasley in her book “You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric” (2004) traces rhetorical constructions of American national identity in presidents’ inaugural addresses and state of the union speeches from the end of the 19th century up to the 21st century. She tries to answer the question what lies in the core of American national identity and what unifies American society characterized by racial, ethnic and cultural diversity. She poses a question, like many others before, “how the American people can possibly attend to both pluribus and unum. How can the United States remain sufficiently

multicultural and monocultural?” The traditional answer to the question “What holds Americans together?”, as she writes, is shared beliefs, values, common way of thinking (Beasley, 2004: 25-26).

The authors from social psychology, political science, sociology, and speech communication conducted numerous research in the second half of the 20th century on purportedly American values and came to a conclusion that prominent values in the United States included an activist approach to life, emphasis on achievement and material success, a moral character (“oriented to such Puritan values as duty, industry, and sobriety”), religious faith, scientific and secular rationality, idealism and perfectionism, equality, self-reliance, moderation, tolerance for diversity, and external conformity. However, the results of these studies typically revealed the sometimes contradictory nature of Americans’ shared beliefs (for instance, they can value both individuality and conformity at the same time) and didn’t answer the question which of them ensure unity in the diversity (Ibid: 35).

Agreeing that the American people are ultimately united by a certain set of beliefs, Beasley, on the basis of analysis of the American presidents’ speeches came to a conclusion that U.S. presidents most commonly associate American national identity with Puritan notions of an American civil religion (Ibid: 47). She claims that presidents often employ civil religious rhetoric to portray the United States as a nation with a divine purpose. This language invokes themes of providence and chosenness, suggesting that Americans are united by shared sacred beliefs. For instance,

references to the nation as “one nation under God”, “God’s chosen people” or invoking the idea of a “city upon a hill” echo Puritan ideals and the notion of American exceptionalism. Such rhetoric serves to create a collective national identity grounded in shared values and divine destiny.

Presidential rhetoric often balances inclusivity and exclusivity in defining national identity. As Beasley writes, “U.S. presidents have repeatedly stated in their speeches that American national identity is based on certain shared beliefs. And they have just as regularly promised that anyone who holds these beliefs is fit to be an American. The appeal of such a definition is obvious. In a country whose citizens may share few of the types of hereditary or biological ties that bind other nations, it makes sense to define national identity ideationally, thus making it available to all comers – at least in theory” (Ibid: 15).

By invoking ideals such as liberty, democracy, and divine purpose, presidential rhetoric locates American national identity not within skin color or pedigree but instead within the heart and the brain, making it theoretically available to anyone (Ibid: 63).

While emphasizing common values and ideals, presidents have also used language that implicitly or explicitly excludes certain groups. For example, civil religious themes can serve not only to include diverse groups under a unified national identity, these same themes have historically been used to justify the exclusion of “the others” (immigrants, racial minorities), who are perceived as not fully embodying American ideals.

The proposition that American people's "very sense of peoplehood derives not from a common lineage but from their adherence to a set of core principles" allows to construct national identity in a way that includes those who adhere to these principles and excludes those who do not.

The language used by presidents often creates symbolic boundaries that define who belongs to the national community. Beasley highlights how references to shared beliefs and values not only unite citizens but also delineate the boundaries of national belonging.

According to Beasley, presidents seem unwilling or perhaps even unable to talk about the American people's diversity without simultaneously invoking the civil religion and shared beliefs. To address the nation's diversity, presidents have utilized rhetoric that allows to manage diversity by framing the nation as a community bound by shared sacred beliefs, thereby fostering a sense of unity despite demographic differences. This approach enables presidents to present a cohesive national identity that accommodates the nation's pluralism (Ibid: 64).

In this part of the paper we'll analyze the inaugural addresses of American presidents, mainly of Joe Biden, Barak Obama and Donald Trump from a linguistic point of view in order to identify the features of shaping national identity in American political discourse.

The term "identity", according to Oxford Learner's Dictionary, has the meaning of "who or what somebody/something is". It also refers to "the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that make people different from others".

The inaugural addresses of American presidents serve as significant texts for analyzing the discursive construction of national identity which is based, consistent with the above-mentioned definition of identity, on the formation of sameness and difference (Wodak et al., 2009: 31). Through their rhetoric, they delineate boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, shaping perceptions of “us” versus “them” and articulating their visions of the nation's values and beliefs.

It should be noted that national identity is constructed in political discourse through different strategies and tactics. The main strategies of political discourse are self-presentation strategy (ascending strategy), discrediting strategy (descending strategy) and theatrical strategy which are fulfilled by means of numerous tactics (Mihaleva O.L., 2009). One of the main tactics related to self-presentation strategy is the tactic of opposing “us” and “them”

For instance, in his 2017 and 2025 inaugural addresses, Donald Trump employs a rhetoric that emphasizes nationalism, portraying a vision of America that is distinct and separate from others. “America will soon be greater, stronger, and far more exceptional than ever before”; “We will be a nation like no other, full of compassion, courage, and exceptionalism” (Trump, 2025). The idea of American uniqueness is expressed also by Biden: “We look ahead in our uniquely American way – restless, bold, optimistic...” (Biden, 2021).

In political discourse different tactics can be combined to express different meanings. For instance, in the following extract from Trump’s

2025 inaugural address the self-presentation strategy is used to express different features of American national identity: “Many people thought it was impossible for me to stage such a historic political comeback. But as you see today, here I am. The American people have spoken. I stand before you now as proof that you should never believe that something is impossible to do. In America, the impossible is what we do best”.

The extract expresses the following key features of American identity:

Belief in the American Dream: The speaker emphasizes personal achievement and overcoming odds, central to the idea that anyone can succeed through hard work and determination.

Resilience and Perseverance: The statement reflects a deep cultural value of never giving up, even when others doubt you. It celebrates bouncing back from failure.

Faith in Democracy and the Will of the People: “The American people have spoken” reflects a respect for democratic processes and the legitimacy of outcomes determined by popular vote.

Optimism and Possibility: The phrase “you should never believe that something is impossible to do” promotes a forward-looking, can-do attitude that’s deeply rooted in American optimism.

Exceptionalism: “In America, the impossible is what we do best” expresses American exceptionalism – the belief that the U.S. is unique and capable of achieving what others cannot.

These features collectively contribute to a significant expression of national identity grounded in faith in one's own strength, self-confidence, democracy, and a culture of equal opportunities.

On accepting the office the president takes the Inaugural Oath in which he commits to upholding the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution as a supreme law of the country is the main national symbol of the United States and is the most important symbol of national identity. Most Americans still view the Constitution, along with the Declaration of Independence and President A. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, as a kind of sacred document (Gadjiev K.S., 1990: 147-148). No wonder American presidents often refer to the Constitution in their inaugural speeches.

In addition to references to the founding documents American presidents consider it important to represent in their inaugural addresses the shared identities of American people. For instance, Joe Biden indicated the following traits of American identity: “What are the common objects we love that define us as Americans? I think I know. Opportunity. Security. Liberty. Dignity. Respect. Honor. And, yes, the truth” (Biden 2021).

In 2025 Trump emphasized in his inaugural speech that he returned to the presidency “at the start of a thrilling new era of national success”, but to seize this opportunity new traits of national identity are required. At first “we must be honest about the challenges we face” and to address these challenges it is necessary to “restore fair, equal, and impartial justice under the constitutional rule of law”. Other identities also correspond to the greatness of the goals and tasks: “It is time for us to once

again act with courage, vigor, and the vitality of history's greatest civilization... The United States will once again consider itself a growing nation – one that increases our wealth, expands our territory, builds our cities, raises our expectations, and carries our flag into new and beautiful horizons” which also include the planet Mars.

One of the most important identity of Americans, according to Trump, is ambition which “is the lifeblood of a great nation, and, right now, our nation is more ambitious than any other”.

According to Trump, “Americans are explorers, builders, innovators, entrepreneurs, and pioneers. The spirit of the frontier is written into our hearts. The call of the next great adventure resounds from within our souls”. Peculiar American identities are also American exceptionalism and self-glorification: “Our American ancestors turned a small group of colonies on the edge of a vast continent into a mighty republic of the most extraordinary citizens on Earth. No one comes close... If we work together, there is nothing we cannot do and no dream we cannot achieve”; “We will stand bravely, we will live proudly, we will dream boldly, and nothing will stand in our way because we are Americans. The future is ours, and our golden age has just begun” (Trump, 2025).

In their inaugural addresses American presidents frequently utilize the inclusive pronoun “we” to foster a sense of unity among their supporters. In Trump’s 2025 and Biden’s 2021 inaugural addresses the pronoun “we” was used 86 and 89 times respectively. Simultaneously the “other” is being constructed through references to political elites, foreign

nations, illegal immigrants, and certain social groups. “The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country. Their victories have not been your victories; their triumphs have not been your triumphs; and while they celebrated in our nation’s Capital, there was little to celebrate for struggling families all across our land” (Trump, 2017). “First, I will declare a national emergency at our southern border. All illegal entry will immediately be halted, and we will begin the process of returning millions and millions of criminal aliens back to the places from which they came” (Trump, 2025).

Trump's rhetoric often includes stark contrasts between the “forgotten men and women” or “struggling families” of America and the “corrupt establishment”, reinforcing a narrative of division and the need to fight against the violation of Constitutional principles of justice and equality. This dichotomy is further emphasized through metaphors of "American carnage", depicting the nation’s struggles as a result of external and internal enemies.

Biden’s and Trump’s inaugural addresses illustrate contrasting approaches to the discursive construction of national identity. Through their use of language, both leaders shape perceptions of who belongs to the national community and what values define the nation. Trump's rhetoric emphasizes division and a return to traditional values (“As of today, it will henceforth be the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders: male and female”), while Biden's discourse promotes unity and inclusivity, aiming to unite Americans around shared ideals.

Biden acknowledges the division of American society and calls for unity as the only way out: “Our history has been a constant struggle between the American ideal that we are all created equal and the harsh, ugly reality that racism, nativism, fear, and demonization have long torn us apart”. Biden acknowledges that racial justice is yet to be achieved (“A cry for racial justice some 400 years in the making moves us. The dream of justice for all will be deferred no longer”) alluding to a BLM movement which became the largest protest movement in U.S. history and which contributed to Trump’ 2020 election loss (Tensley, 2024). To address the challenges, including those of racial inequality, Biden calls for unity: “This is our historic moment of crisis and challenge, and unity is the path forward” (Biden 2021). The words “unity” and “uniting” were repeated by Biden in his inaugural address 13 times.

Other means of expressing national identity in American presidents’ inaugural addresses include:

Allusions to Foundational Ideals: “What makes us exceptional – what makes us American – is our allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”” (Obama, 2013). “The American ideal that we are all created equal” (Biden, 2021).

Historical Allusions: “In another January in Washington, on New Year’s Day 1863, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

When he put pen to paper, the President said, “If my name ever goes down into history it will be for this act and my whole soul is in it.” (Biden, 2021).

Reference to national symbols: “You know the resilience of our Constitution and the strength of our nation”. “On “We the People” who seek a more perfect Union” (Biden 2021). “What makes us exceptional – what makes us American – is our allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago”. “My oath is not so different from the pledge we all make to the flag that waves above and that fills our hearts with pride” (Obama, 2013). “It is time to remember that old wisdom our soldiers will never forget: that whether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots, we all enjoy the same glorious freedoms, and we all salute the same great American Flag” (Trump, 2017). “We will not forget our country, we will not forget our Constitution, and we will not forget our God”. “And we will pursue our manifest destiny into the stars, launching American astronauts to plant the Stars and Stripes on the planet Mars” (Trump, 2025).

Portraying American identity as resilient and inclusive: “You know the resilience of our Constitution and the strength of our nation”. “But the American story depends not on any one of us, not on some of us, but on all of us. On “We the People” who seek a more perfect Union” (Biden 2021).

Moral and Ethical Appeals: “I will give my all in your service thinking not of power, but of possibilities. Not of personal interest, but of the public good” (Biden, 2021).

The leading role in promoting democracy globally, both through its foreign policy and by setting an example at home: “We can make America, once again, the leading force for good in the world“. “That our America secured liberty at home and stood once again as a beacon to the world” (Biden 2021).

The use of possessive pronoun “our” in the expression “our America” is highly significant. It promotes the idea of collective ownership of the nation, highlights common identity in connection with national geography and territory with its boundaries, landscapes and natural resources, implies unity and inclusion, even amid diversity or division and acting as an emotional appeal (pathos) evokes a sense of sameness, national cohesion and unity. The metaphor “a beacon to the world” has deep roots in American political rhetoric, e.g., “shining city on a hill” (R. Reagan), which used to symbolize the United States as a beacon of freedom and opportunity for the world. It reflects the same account of American identity as once offered by John Winthrop, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the chief figure among the Puritan founders of New England. He asked an audience of pilgrims to remember God’s need for their community to represent a “city on a hill” and thus a beacon for all other nations (Beasley, 2004, 47).

Here are some more examples of shared values and principles as expressed in inaugural addresses of American presidents:

Unity as a Core Value: “Unity is the path forward.”; “With unity we can do great things, important things”. In these examples Biden framed

unity not only as a political goal but as a foundational American value, vital for healing and progress.

Truth and Democracy: “There is truth and there are lies – lies told for power and for profit. And each of us has a duty and responsibility... to defend the truth and defeat the lies”. Here, Biden called on a moral and civic responsibility to uphold truth, a fundamental aspect of traditional American democratic ideals.

In the following example an allusion is made to Abraham Lincoln’s words describing American government as a “government of the people, by the people, for the people” referring to its democratic character: “Today, we celebrate the triumph not of a candidate, but of a cause, the cause of democracy. The will of the people has been heard and the will of the people has been heeded” (Biden, 2021). The principle of democracy was also highlighted by Donald Trump in his first Inaugural Address: “What truly matters is not which party controls our government, but whether our government is controlled by the people”.

Constitutional Principles: This reflects the necessity to end confrontation and return to constitutional values of equality and unity, mutual respect and tolerance irrespective of racial, ethnic, or religious differences. One of the most often cited parts of constitution is its opening line starting with the words “We, the People of the United States”. For instance, Obama in his second inaugural address (2013) repeated this phrase at the beginning of five successive paragraphs. Though American constitution does not define who the people are, or on what basis

individuals are to be included in the national community (Fukuyama, 2018: 133), American presidents usually refer to this initial line of the constitution especially when they speak about the issues of equality, national unity, solidarity and inclusivity. Here is a quote from Obama's second inaugural address: "We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths – that all of us are created equal – is the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls, and Selma, and Stonewall; just as it guided all those men and women, sung and unsung, who left footprints along this great Mall, to hear a preacher say that we cannot walk alone; to hear a King proclaim that our individual freedom is inextricably bound to the freedom of every soul on Earth". In this passage the principles of equality and inclusivity are presented as a main national trait. Linguistically they are expressed by means of metonymy (Seneca Falls refers to the birthplace of women's rights movement, Selma – to the fight for Civil rights of Black Americans, Stonewall – for LGBTQ rights) and allusion (reference to M.L. King's "I Have a Dream" speech).

Protestant work ethic: According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Protestant ethic "stresses the virtue of hard work, thrift, and self-discipline". Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines Protestant work ethic as "the idea that a person has a duty to work hard and spend their time and money in a careful, responsible way". Longman Dictionary defines work ethic as "a belief in the moral value and importance of work". As it is seen from these definition, Protestant work ethic emphasizes such categories as virtue, i.e. behaviour that is morally good, meaning that it is morally good

to work hard, duty, responsibility, belief in the moral value and importance of work. The topic of hard work in one way or another is always present in American presidents' inaugural addresses. For instance, Obama in 2013 inaugural address spoke about hard work as a constant feature of American character: "Our celebration of initiative and enterprise, our insistence on hard work and personal responsibility, these are constants in our character"; "So we must harness new ideas and technology to remake our government, revamp our tax code, reform our schools, and empower our citizens with the skills they need to work harder, learn more, reach higher" (Obama 2013). Trump, who has long maintained that his commitment to hard work is the reason for his success, called on Americans to get off of welfare and get back to work. In his 2017 inaugural address he said: "We will get our people off of welfare and back to work – rebuilding our country with American hands and American labor" (Trump, 2017). Biden in his 2021 inaugural address cited a verse from a song "American Anthem" which emphasized the values of hard work and religious devotion as well as the importance of giving one's best in service to the nation. He finished the citation by saying: "Let us add our own work and prayers to the unfolding story of our nation".

Faith and Religion: Religion plays a significant role in American political discourse, influencing political sentiment, the formation of political views, and participation in the political process. Christianity, particularly Protestantism, is the dominant religion in the United States, and its influence on political life is noticeable. American presidents in their

speeches often address faith and religion which are an integral part of American society and characteristic feature of American national identity. In the following example Biden, speaking about the fight against COVID-19, invokes the Bible and spiritual language, echoing religious and cultural traditions that many Americans consider part of their heritage: “We must set aside the politics and finally face this pandemic as one nation. And I promise you this: as the Bible says, ‘weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.’ We will get through this together”.

In his 2025 inaugural address Trump said: “Just a few months ago, in a beautiful Pennsylvania field, an assassin’s bullet ripped through my ear. But I felt then and believe even more so now that my life was saved for a reason. I was saved by God to make America great again”.

The assertion “I was saved by God” places his survival within a religious framework – suggesting that his life has a God-ordained purpose. By stating “I was saved by God to make America great again,” Trump links his political mission directly to divine will. This implies not only that his survival was miraculous, but that his main objective – “Make America Great Again” – carries spiritual weight or moral destiny.

Deepening ideological division between Republicans and Democrats is reflected in the speeches of presidents representing these parties. As already noted, Biden's rhetoric about national identity focuses on unity, democracy, inclusivity, and healing the divisions in American society, whereas Trump's approach to national identity often centered on themes of American exceptionalism, a strong border, and the defense of

“traditional” values, often appealing to populist sentiments. His rhetoric frequently emphasized the idea of “Make America Great Again” (MAGA), a slogan that evoked a nostalgic vision of an idealized past and focused on returning the country to its perceived former greatness with a focus on military strength and economic protectionism.

In his 2017 and 2025 inaugural addresses, Trump framed the idea of national identity around the concept of reclaiming American sovereignty and protecting the neglected rights of working people of America. He presented a vision of national identity based on economic nationalism (“We will follow two simple rules: Buy American and Hire American”), protecting American jobs and interests, fighting against illegal immigration and protection of U.S. borders.

In his first inaugural address he actively utilized repetition as a tactical means of the theatrical strategy which included promises and rhetorical appeals: “We will bring back our jobs. We will bring back our borders. We will bring back our wealth. And we will bring back our dreams”. The phrase “bring back” was also used several times in his 2025 inaugural address: “We will move with purpose and speed to bring back hope, prosperity, safety, and peace for citizens of every race, religion, color, and creed”. “I also will sign an executive order to immediately stop all government censorship and bring back free speech to America”. “And we are going to bring law and order back to our cities”.

The repeated use of “bring back” is more than stylistic. It is not only short, memorable, and emotionally charged. It's a part of deliberate

rhetorical strategy of discrediting, consisting of the illustration of the negative results of the actions of the former administration and blaming it for them. For instance, in his 2025 inaugural address Trump spoke about “horrible betrayal” and “many betrayals” of the people by the previous administration and promised to give the people back their faith, wealth, democracy, and freedom: “My recent election is a mandate to completely and totally reverse a horrible betrayal and all of these many betrayals that have taken place and to give the people back their faith, their wealth, their democracy, and, indeed, their freedom”. Linguistic means of the tactics of blaming consist of lexical units with negative meaning, including negatively evaluative epithets (e.g. horrible betrayal). Phrases “bring back”, “give the people back” are used to illustrate negative results of the former administration’s policy as they imply that some bad, unjust or unlawful things had happened as a result of which American people were deprived of something valuable, necessary and important, which should be recovered. It ties American identity to a glorified past (as does Trump’s presidential campaign slogan “Make America Great Again”), framing restoration as a patriotic act and Trump’s leadership as redemptive.

Usually in formal speeches, especially in inaugural addresses, presidents avoid speaking about challenges connected with country’s diversity preferring to stress the unity of the nation and its importance. When they do speak about diversity they present it as a source of strength, not weakness. For instance, in his first inaugural address in 2009 Barak Obama explicitly framed America’s diversity as a source of strength and

unity: “For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace” (Obama 2009).

In this passage Obama, acknowledging non-believers alongside major religions, directly affirms religious pluralism, treating it not as a threat but as part of America’s identity. By the phrase “For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness” Obama explicitly described America’s diversity – ethnic, racial, cultural – as a positive force, rather than something to be overcome. Moreover, the term “patchwork” acknowledges complexity, but affirms unity through inclusion, not assimilation.

Biden referred to America's diversity in his inaugural address on January 20, 2021 by acknowledging the nation's long-standing struggles with racism and nativism, emphasizing the need to confront these issues to fulfil the American ideal that “all men and women are created equal”. In his speech, Biden stated: "Our history has been a constant struggle between the American ideal that we are all created equal and the harsh, ugly reality that racism, nativism, fear, and demonization have long torn us apart". He

further highlighted the importance of unity in overcoming these challenges: “With unity, we can do great things... We can deliver racial justice and we can make America once again the leading force for good in the world”.

As for Trump, he touched upon America’s diversity issues in the context of his critics of former administration policy. For instance, using discrediting strategy Trump criticized Biden’s administration for allowing uncontrolled entry of immigrants to the country. “We have a government, he said, that has given unlimited funding to the defense of foreign borders but refuses to defend American borders or, more importantly, its own people”. For his part, he promised that “All illegal entry will immediately be halted, and we will begin the process of returning millions and millions of criminal aliens back to the places from which they came. We will reinstate my Remain in Mexico policy. I will end the practice of catch and release”. He also promised that he would end “the government policy of trying to socially engineer race and gender into every aspect of public and private life. We will forge a society that is colorblind and merit-based”.

Nevertheless, the analysis of rhetoric used by Biden and Trump in their inaugural addresses reveal the high degree of polarization that exists in American society. Referring to the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol carried out by Trump’s supporters Biden called it an attack on democracy carried out by a riotous mob: “And here we stand, just days after a riotous mob thought they could use violence to silence the will of the

people, to stop the work of our democracy, and to drive us from this sacred ground... We face an attack on democracy and on truth”.

To highlight the severity of polarization he even used the metaphor “uncivil war” which describes the deep political and social divisions in the U.S. as a kind of civil war, even though no actual war is happening: “We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal”.

The division of American society not only along political and ideological but also along racial lines becomes obvious from the following quote from Biden’s inaugural address: “And now, a rise in political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism that we must confront and we will defeat”.

From time to time, in relevance to the situation, American presidents referring to country’s diversity acknowledged the existence of racial divisions in the country, as did, for instance, Bill Clinton who in his second inaugural address in 1997 referred to the “divide of race” calling it “America’s constant curse” (Beasley, 2004: 118). Barack Obama in his first inaugural address in 2009, spoke about segregation and racial discrimination in American history and observed that “a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath”. Remarkably, Obama in this passage not only acknowledged the existence of racial inequality, but also indicated great progress and achievement in the fight against it the most vivid and

important manifestation of which was his election as president (“can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath”)

But Biden is the first to specifically acknowledge the existence of white supremacy (Todd, 2021). Using this expression he wanted to underline the seriousness of the racial problem and his determination to address it. No doubt, by using the phrase “white supremacy” along with such phrases as “political extremism” and “domestic terrorism”, he was also alluding to Trump’s supporters. As it is known, some of them incited by Trump’s claims of widespread voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election attempted to stop Congress from certifying the Electoral College results, in which Black and Latino voters played a significant role in handing victory to Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. Wishing to underscore the significance of this victory and his belief that things can change, Biden in his inaugural speech highlighted the historic nature of the swearing in of Harris, the first woman and first Black and South Asian person to hold that office (Stafford, Morrison, 2021).

But the effectiveness of identity politics based on a particular identity, such as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, etc. has its limitations. For instance, during the presidential campaign in 2016 Trump’s opponents actively pursuing identity politics criticized him for his neglect of interest of POCs. They accused him of “racial discrimination”, of using offensive language towards black people, seeing only shortcomings, ignoring successes and having no “solutions to take on the reality of systemic racism and create more equity and opportunity in communities of

color and for every American” (Clinton, 2016). Nevertheless, identity politics conducted by Democrats proved ineffective. Analyzing the results of 2016 presidential election, Mark Lilla, a liberal political scientist, argues that Democratic party’s messaging on identity politics benefited Republicans more than Democrats. Instead of concentrating on certain shared principles, Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton slipped into “the rhetoric of diversity, calling out explicitly to African-American, Latino, L.G.B.T. and women voters”. And this was a strategic mistake. “If you are going to mention groups in America, he writes, you had better mention all of them. If you don’t, those left out will notice and feel excluded” (Lilla, 2016). This was exactly what happened with the white working class and those with strong religious convictions who voted for Donald Trump.

As for Trump, though he also made the election in large part about race and identity, he, as Fukuyama notices, was careful not to articulate overtly racist views (Fukuyama 2018: 120). Researchers of Trump’s presidential campaign notice that though ethno-nationalism was central to his campaign rhetoric, he tended to avoid explicitly referring to it. He rarely defended white Americans directly, instead, tended to rely upon thinly veiled speech codes (coded language) known as “dog whistles” to implicitly refer to them (Woods, 2024; Lopez, 2017). For instance, he did it when he said he would support “silent majority” and “forgotten men and women”, or when he claimed he would protect “suburban housewives” from the threat of illegal migrants (from “this monster that got out of prison”, who “he’s got six charges of murdering six different people”) (WSJ, 2024). His

presidential campaign slogan about making America great again was a direct reference to the period of R. Reagan's presidency (Reagan used the same slogan in his 1980 presidential campaign – "Let's make America great again") which was characterized by increasing immigration restrictions (Beasley, 2004: 71-72).

Trump built his campaign around opposition to illegal immigration, especially from Mexico and the Muslim world and presented it as a threat to the whole country, to all American citizens irrespective of their racial or ethnic differences. Perhaps, it was one of the reason that he managed to increase the support in 2024 elections from African-Americans and Latino and Hispanic Americans. Another reason that significant part of minority groups voted in 2024 for Trump was economic (his promise to reduce taxes and create new jobs) as well as their traditional or conservative views on family issues.

During his first presidential campaign, speaking about illegal immigrants, Trump accused other countries, especially Mexico, for sending to America "not the right people" and, disregarding the rules of political correctness, called them "rapists" who bring drugs and crime". In his first speech as president he said: "We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength" (Trump, 2017).

Trump's tough stance on illegal immigration, which was presented as a real danger for the country, contributed to the creation of an

atmosphere of fear and intolerance and generated anti-immigrant and xenophobic attitudes shaping corresponding identity. Reflecting this kind of mentality, many of Trump's supporters asserted they wanted to "take back their country," "a claim that implies their country has somehow been stolen from them" (Fukuyama, 2018: 154).

During 2024 presidential campaign Trump continued to exploit anti-immigrant sentiments, speaking about the threats posed by illegal migrants. In an interview with Time magazine, on April 30 2024, he said that "they (illegal migrants – S.A.) come in" and "they steal our jobs, and they steal our wealth, they steal our country". In his 2025 inaugural address Trump characterized illegal immigrants as "dangerous criminals", "many from prisons and mental institutions, that have illegally entered our country from all over the world". He used military terminology to compare illegal immigration with "the disastrous invasion of our country" which should immediately be "halted" and "repelled". He promised to take immediate measures which among others included declaration of a national emergency at the country's southern border and sending troops there (Trump, 2025).

As Fukuyama notices, by taking on political correctness so frontally, Trump has played a critical role in moving the focus of identity politics from the left, where it was born, to the right, where it is now taking root. Identity politics on the left tended to legitimate only certain identities while ignoring or denigrating others, such as European (i.e., white) ethnicity, Christian religiosity, rural residence, belief in traditional family

values, and related categories. As a result, on the right, populist nationalism began to thrive that would only “reassert an ethnic or religious understanding of the country” (Fukuyama, 2018:159).

Meanwhile the success of the United States as a nation depended not just on a minimal creedal understanding of identity, but on certain cultural norms and virtues as well. Fukuyama agrees with Huntington that the culture is important, not the ethnic or religious identities, and that it was Anglo-Protestant culture as a necessary component of American identity that ensured American success, a culture that was built around the Protestant work ethic.

In summary, national identity is characterized by its variability, it depends on numerous factors, social, political, economic, etc, it can be constructed and reconstructed linguistically by means of different strategies and tactics. But there are also constant factors that shape national identity and first of all it is the prevalent culture, traditions, norms and values.

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