

Empire by Reputation (word count: 13,066)

Whether the United States should be conceptualized as an empire has recently been the subject of scholarly debate.¹ The debate over American empire has tended to take place at a high level of abstraction, has often revolved around definitional differences, has been characterized by a dearth of testable hypotheses, and has been dominated by normative rather than analytical purposes. This article seeks to improve our understanding of the contemporary politics of empire by focusing analytical attention on the phenomenon of imperial reputation.

Let us be clear: We do not take imperial reputation to be identical with empire, but rather to be an element of imperial relationships. Imperial reputation refers to collective beliefs among those subjected to control or among third parties about the imperial character of a state rather than the structural characteristics of these relationships. The two are obviously related, and imperial reputation has always been a critical component of empire, as traditional empires almost invariably sought to instill collective beliefs among their subjects and others about their imperial status. But the two need not vary together and sometimes do not. A state may possess many of the structural characteristics associated with empire (in Motyl's definition, for instance, hierarchical relationships of control between a core and periphery and weak ties between peripheries),² yet not gain a widespread imperial reputation.³ In other cases, a state might gain a

¹For a summary of the debate, see Nexon and Wright 2007.

²Motyl 2001.

³Some have suggested that contemporary Nigeria, India, and Indonesia fit this description. Lieven 2000, 77-82.

widespread imperial reputation, yet the hub-and-spoke-like hierarchy often taken as the structural hallmark of empire may be only weakly present. The relationship between structure and reputation needs to be probed empirically rather than assumed.

Yet structure cannot be entirely separated from how people understand empire. There are a number of reasons why, over the last century, reputation has grown increasingly central to the politics of empire. As we will show, the rise and consolidation of a number of anti-imperial norms have transformed empire as a practical category of politics into a near-universal pejorative, have turned empire into a quality that states invariably deny, and have altered the practices that are widely construed as “imperial.” These changes in turn bear important implications for how empire is exercised and how it should be conceptualized, measured, and studied. They also point the growing role of reputation as an integral element of imperial politics.

Traditional approaches to the study of empire and imperialism largely ignore the dimension of reputation. There is a circular character to much of the debate about empire in the contemporary era. For example, most works about American empire begin by defining empire and then proceed to demonstrate why the United States does or does not fit the definition that the author has chosen. Some scholars take America’s imperial status for granted.⁴ Others argue against it and prefer to classify the United States as a hegemon or a superpower.⁵ In either case, the purpose of such analyses is often merely classificatory, with authors trying to prove that

⁴Kinzer 2006; Ferguson 2004; Johnson 2004; Thayer 2006.

⁵Motyl 2005; Ikenberry 2004.

America is, is not, or is somewhat an empire—with consequences flowing from the act of classification itself. Authors move up and down Sartori’s ladder of abstraction,⁶ including or excluding attributes of empire so as to exclude or include the United States from the general phenomenon. Thus, findings largely reflect different definitional starting points. Sometimes empire is used metaphorically, though rarely do authors make clear why the metaphor might be useful heuristically. Similar issues have plagued application of the empire construct to other contemporary states such as the Soviet Union, post-Soviet Russia, and the People’s Republic of China.⁷

Much of the debate over empire in contemporary politics has overlooked two important facts: that multiple types of relationships have historically been characteristic of empire and that there are significant differences between historical empires and great powers that function within today’s world of robust sovereignty and self-determination norms. Given that the concept of empire refers to phenomena that transcend five thousand years of human history, empire cannot be analyzed within the confines of a singular trans-historical model, but can at best be defined at a high level of abstraction or conceived of as a family resemblance concept.⁸ Even prototypical historical empires contained multiple relationships that do not comfortably fit within the

⁶Sartori 1970.

⁷Author 2005.

⁸A family resemblance is a cluster of inter-related models or family of objects that do not invariably share all the same characteristics, but that share enough important characteristics to make meaningful analogy possible. Family resemblance concept structures are relevant for concepts which incorporate a great multiplicity of settings and contain variant meanings related to one another historically—both features characteristic of empire. See Goetz 2006, 45 and 63. On empire as a family resemblance concept, see Author, 2006.

confines of most definitions. The Roman Empire, for instance, first developed as a network of cities and their adjacent territories that were bound to the city of Rome by treaty, and only later broadened to include both conquered territories and dependent kingdoms (some of which exercised considerable autonomy). The Romans eventually extended citizenship to all inhabitants of the Empire by 212 A.D., blurring the line between core and periphery, citizen and subject. And much of the Roman army itself was staffed by “barbarians” who had migrated across the frontier to gain Roman protection or had pledged a feeble loyalty to Rome after surrendering, so that even the line between “barbarians” and Romans was fluid.⁹ Likewise, the modes and motives of British imperial rule in India, North America, Africa, and the Middle East differed greatly in each of these contexts. No single colonial model predominated, as British policy alternated between a model of “composite monarchy” (conceived of as rule over like societies rather than foreign ones--as, for instance, in North America) and a model of conquest and indirect rule (particularly where settlement and replacement proved impossible due to high population densities and sharp cultural boundaries).¹⁰ In the case of the United States, the difficulties of characterizing America unambiguously as an empire are profound. The history of the country is filled with different types of policies--some imperial, some not.¹¹ While engaging in openly imperial projects in the nineteenth century, by the early twentieth century the United States forsook permanent colonial possession and assumed a critical stance toward European colonial empires--coming to champion the principle of self-determination, and later, prodding European empires toward decolonization. Yet, accusations of American empire persisted,

⁹Geary 2002.

¹⁰Greene 2002; Armitage 2000.

¹¹Mayers 2007; Heiss 2002.

encouraged by American interventions in Central America in the first half of the century, the rise of U.S. global power during the Cold War, and American misadventures in Vietnam and elsewhere.

Perhaps more importantly, when people refer to the imperial quality of the United States today, they have in mind significantly different features and practices than those associated with empires sixty years ago. A Gallup poll conducted among 3,029 Americans in 1946 asked respondents what it meant for a country to be imperialistic; the most common responses were one-person rule and territorial expansion.¹² Multiple conceptions of empire have always co-existed.¹³ But as the responses to the 1946 poll reflect, prior to decolonization and the consolidation of sovereignty norms following World War II, the predominant understanding of empire (at least among the non-colonized) was as an extensive political dominion under the control of an emperor and/or obtained by conquest. Neither of these features apply unambiguously to contemporary states. Nevertheless, belief in the continued existence of empires is widespread. A YouGov/Daily Telegraph poll in 2006 found that 58 percent of the 1,962 British citizens surveyed agreed that it was fair to describe the United States as an “imperial power, one that wants to dominate the world by one means or another.”¹⁴ Even many Americans agree with this characterization. A Zogby International/Foreign Policy Association

¹²These features were identified by 35 percent and 23 percent of those responding, respectively. Half of the sample did not know what the word “imperialist” meant. For the data from the survey, see Gallup Organization, “Gallup Poll #1946-0386: German Scientists/United Nations/Unions/Prices/Foreign Relations,” December 13-18, 1946, available at <http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/> (accessed July 2007).

¹³Pagden 1995.

¹⁴Fenton 2006.

poll taken in 2003 found that 59 percent of the 1,000 Americans sampled agreed that the United States is “an imperialist power that acts on its own, regardless of what the rest of the world thinks.”¹⁵ In short, regardless of whether scholars choose to characterize the United States as imperial, and regardless of the significant differences between American foreign policy and those of traditional empires, America’s imperial reputation is a social fact that cannot be dismissed and that begs explication, particularly in a world in which formal empires no longer exist. Of course, the United States is not the only state in today’s world to bear an imperial reputation. Nevertheless, as the above surveys indicate, American imperial reputation is widespread, even among America’s closest allies.

In what follows, we address the nature of imperial reputation as a phenomenon and use the concept to analyze perceptions of contemporary American foreign policy. We first lay out what we believe to be the fundamental factors that transformed empire over the past century into a pejorative, altered the ways in which people understand empire, and brought the reputational dimension of empire to the fore: the rise and consolidation of anti-imperial norms of sovereignty and self-determination, particularly during the Cold War. Assuming a position of “cautious naturalism”¹⁶ that grounds reputations in real behavioral histories but recognizes how they are also shaped through communication networks, we then present a conception of imperial reputation as a form of bad reputation. Here, we seek to identify not only some of the circumstances under which states might choose to bear the reputational costs associated with

¹⁵Zogby International and the Foreign Policy Association, “Americans and the World Around Them,” September 30, 2003, available at <http://www.zogby.com/search/ReadNews.dbm?ID=742> (accessed July 2007).

¹⁶Fine 2001.

imperial behaviors despite the prevalence of anti-imperial norms, but also those circumstances under which imperial reputation might generate significant reputational pressures for rolling back imperial undertakings. Finally, using the example of the proliferation of American imperial reputation during the Bush years, we examine empirically the concrete attributes and behaviors that today evoke imperial reputation through a content analysis of media representations of American empire. Specifically, we demonstrate that American imperial reputation contains three distinct models that combine structural attributes with specific behaviors and that relate to norms about how the powerful should behave: forceful subjugation, unilateral hierarchy, and the illegitimate use of force. We also show that these models appear in roughly similar form across diverse cultural and political boundaries, reflecting a broader political logic.

Normative Order and the Reputational Dimension of Empire

Reputation must loom large in any discussion of contemporary empire (American or otherwise) because of the normative sea-change with respect to empire that occurred in the twentieth century. Many of the central elements of the normative order that currently predominates in international politics can be traced directly to efforts to contain the dysfunctions associated with traditional empires. We live today in a world that is normatively anti-imperial. This is in sharp contrast to a century ago. On the eve of the First World War the world consisted almost entirely of self-avowed empires. Wolfgang Mommsen described the reigning atmosphere: “[T]he world of the future would be dominated by great empires, and any nation state which did not join their ranks was condemned to inferior status.”¹⁷ So normal was the open striving for empire that a large portion of the world’s political and intellectual elites viewed

¹⁷Mommsen 1977, 6-7.

empire as an inevitable and necessary attribute of a modern nation-state and the embodiment of civilized norms and modes of behavior. As Henry Cabot Lodge portrayed the Spencerian logic underlying such judgments, “The modern movement is all toward the concentration of people and territory into great nations and large dominions. . . . As one of the great nations of the world, the United States must not fall out of the line of march.”¹⁸ Most leaders consciously sought imperial reputations for their states as recognition of their rightful control and civilizational superiority. They saw the greatness of their imperial enterprises as the primary foundation for domestic and international authority. Glory achieved by military expansion constituted its own justification for action, and domination over other states or over culturally distinct groups was considered a proper and justified activity, part of the “civilizing mission” of turning colonial subjects into worthy “humans.” Empire most certainly was not a matter of shame.

By contrast, today empire is predominantly considered a political pathology. Although the underlying motives for empire--whether geo-strategic or economic--may persist and continue to guide states’ foreign policies, empire can no longer be openly pursued (or even openly discussed) in the same way. As historian Stephen Howe has noted, “defining something as imperial or colonial today almost always implies hostility to it, viewing it as inherently immoral and illegitimate.”¹⁹ The history of imperialism and colonialism, of course, was replete with

¹⁸Lodge, quoted in Tompkins 1970, 4-5.

¹⁹Howe 2002, 9. In this article we report results from a content analysis of 2,287 articles published in the publication *World News Connection* from 1996-2003 that used the terms empire, imperial, imperialist, imperialism, colony, colonial, or colonialism with respect to contemporary states. In that sample, 98 percent of all articles used these terms exclusively in a pejorative fashion. Moreover, there was little variation across categories of speakers--irrespective of whether the speaker came from a NATO country, represented a communist country or leftist movement, or represented a traditionally Muslim country or Islamist movement, and irrespective of whether the speaker was a government official, a movement leader, or a journalist--a pattern

rebellions, wars, and dissent, even to the point that it is difficult to talk about empire historically without reference to the resistance that, almost by definition, accompanied it.²⁰ Nevertheless, it was not until the latter part of the twentieth century that resistance against *specific* empires translated into the near-universal illegitimacy of *all* empires.

As a way of demonstrating the changing norms associated with empire over the past century, we performed a content analysis of the usage of the words empire, imperial, imperialism, and associated words in *The New York Times* between 1900 and 2000. For each decade beginning with 1900, we identified the first fifty articles that referred to a contemporary country (at the time of the article's writing) as an empire, imperial, imperialist, or some related formulation. Each article's tone toward empire and imperialism was coded as positive, neutral, or negative. For example, a reference to a state that condemned it as an empire or that associated its imperialist policies with aggressive war would be coded as "negative," while a reference that noted the state's greatness as an empire or celebrated its contemporary statesmen as empire-makers would be coded as "positive." Articles that used the terms merely in a descriptive way—either as a proper name or without displaying support or opposition--were coded as "neutral."

As can be seen in Figure 1, the meanings associated with empire and imperialism in American political discourse altered remarkably over the twentieth century, with negative references rising at first after World War I, becoming dominant after World War II, and growing

that could only be a reflection of the existence of global norms against empire.

²⁰Maier 2006, 9.

hegemonic during the Cold War. As the figure shows, during the Cold War empire became almost universally a derogatory term—due largely, we believe, to the combined impact of decolonization, Marxist-Leninist anti-imperial mobilization against the West, Cold War competition for influence in the third world, and American use of anti-imperial rhetoric against the Soviet Union. It appears that empire was never used as a predominantly positive label, even during the height of imperialism in the early twentieth century. Even so, the proportion of positive references to empire dropped significantly from around 20 percent in 1900 to virtually nil from 1970 through 1990. Rather, in the early part of the century, empire was used predominantly as a neutral descriptor, as leaders saw nothing wrong with calling their states empires or speaking about their imperial goals or policies. Thus, at the turn of the century empire was a banal part of everyday life.

As the normative value associated with empire transformed over the twentieth century, its usage as a neutral descriptor declined sharply. Moreover, as Figure 2 shows, as empire became predominantly a pejorative, its frequency as a way of referring to contemporary states also declined sharply, having been used two to three times less frequently to describe contemporary states during the Cold War than previously (as exhibited in the number of days it took for us to catalog fifty articles referring to a contemporary state in imperial language). This decline in frequency was not simply due to the fact that formal empires were dissolving. Empire was also becoming a way of referring to illegitimate state power, and therefore came to be considered an impolite way of referring to contemporary states.²¹ After the Cold War, while the pejorative connotation attached to empire remained predominant, empire became a remarkably

²¹See Doyle 1986, 11-12; Lieven 2000, 413.

infrequent way to refer to contemporary states in American political discourse. Thus, by 2000, references to contemporary states as empires were twenty-two times less frequent than in the early part of the twentieth century and approximately ten times less frequent than during the Cold War. Yet, by 2000 we also observe some revival of neutral and positive references to empire within American political discourse, primarily (though not exclusively) connected with the rise of neo-conservative discourse on American empire and presaging the Bush administration's subsequent unilateral assertions of power. The appearance of some neutral and positive speech toward empire in the United States in 2000 stands in contrast to the rest of the world, which continued to reflect Cold War patterns; in a parallel sample of 212 articles that referred to contemporary states as empires and that were published in the year 2000 in *World News Connection* (a U.S. government publication that translates articles from the world press), 98 percent of references were negative and only 2 percent were positive or neutral.

[FIGURES 1 and 2 HERE]

We argue that central to the transformation of the normative value attached to empire in the twentieth century was the consolidation of anti-imperial norms of state sovereignty and national self-determination. The roots of these normative shifts had been gradually prepared by several centuries of development. In most empires prior to the rise of sovereignty norms, frontiers extended as far as military force could extend its control, and the application of the law extended correspondingly. Moreover, relationships of obligation were overlapping and competing. By contrast, the key aspects of a world of sovereign states are the territorial boundedness of political power and the mutual recognition of the legitimacy of these territorial bindings by other like units. The implications of such a shift in political organization for empire

were multiple, ubiquitous, and profound. First and foremost, emerging state sovereignty norms eroded the legitimacy of universal empire. They did so at first by secularizing empire and eliminating its pretensions in the European context to represent the universal claims of the Church.²² Westphalia was part of a larger process by which universal imperial ambitions gradually came to lie outside widely accepted norms of European international behavior and the emerging body of international law regulating relations between states. As states projected their empires outward from Europe, they did so in a context of increasingly bounded authority within Europe, with multiple empires recognizing each other's legitimate existence, even while they contended over the extent of their non-European dominions. Napoleon's attempts to create a new universal but secular empire violated the foundations of this emerging state system. The Congress and Concert systems that developed in the wake of the Napoleonic wars sought to create a set of behavioral norms (the balance of power) aimed at preserving states (or at least the most powerful ones) within the European arena so as to avoid the malady of universal empire.

Norms of state sovereignty thus developed non-linearly, unevenly, and in fits and starts, usually growing more institutionalized in the wake of major wars or crises in which nascent norms were violated. But in the first six decades of the twentieth century, attitudes toward the use of force in international relations underwent what can only be called revolutionary change.²³ Beginning with the Porter Convention of 1907 outlawing the use of force by states for collecting debts, proceeding to the League of Nations Covenant obliging states to respect and preserve the territorial integrity of states against external aggression and to the Kellogg-Briant Pact of 1928 forbidding war as an instrument of first resort, and culminating in the United Nations Charter

²²Pagden 1995, 29-62; Spruyt 1994.

²³Philpott 2001.

outlawing aggressive warfare altogether, international law came to affirm the territorial integrity of states as a first order principle. Force was no longer considered a legitimate means of acquiring territory.²⁴ Even as late as the mid-twentieth century, Nazi imperialism threatened the sovereignty of European states. Yet, it was in the wake of this crisis that norms against territorial expansion through war were fully institutionalized in international law as a formal condition for membership in the United Nations. Thus, in addition to delegitimizing universal empire, the consolidation of robust state sovereignty norms transformed empire by rendering the practice of territorial conquest (once the central practice associated with empire) illegitimate and illegal in the eyes of international law. Since the end of World War II territorial aggrandizement through war has almost disappeared, with practically all of the decline in interstate warfare in the post-World War II period due to the decline and disappearance of wars of territorial conquest.²⁵ As the costs of territorial expansion rose as a result of rising anti-colonial resistance, the value of territorial expansion to states declined, and states found other ways of pursuing advantages abroad. The context of consolidated state sovereignty norms meant that the use of force against another state required justification in terms of international law, and the crossing of an international frontier by military force was generally ruled out by international law except when authorized by the “society of nations.”²⁶ As will be evident below, these norms—themselves the

²⁴Jennings 1963.

²⁵Sarkees, Wayman, and Singer 2003; Fazal 2007.

²⁶Walzer 1977, 86 and 106; Finnemore 2003. In this way, for example, irrespective of the degree of local opposition that post-war reconstruction might meet in a country, when the UN leads post-war reconstruction, it is usually regarded as a legitimate “administration” by third-party observers, whereas when the US does so on its own, it is usually regarded as “occupation.” The role of international organizations like NATO in occupation politics has often revolved less around their military capabilities as distinct from the United States than in their ability to lend a political legitimacy to military operations that might otherwise be absent. See Marten 2004.

product of efforts to contain the dysfunctions of imperial conquest--created important benchmarks for the kind of behavior that today is judged "imperial."

Norms of state sovereignty also created a discrepancy between the formal equality of states in the international system and the stark inequalities that exist among states in actual fact. Hierarchy is a naturally occurring phenomenon in politics and is the basis of all political orders. People routinely accept some degree of hierarchy in their lives as tolerable and even legitimate, often in exchange for material or ideational selective benefits or out of an inability to alter these conditions. Empires are forms of hierarchy, and while some authors (for instance, Ferguson)²⁷ have argued that certain imperial hierarchies also generated some public goods (such as a stable monetary and financial order, protection against pirates and rogue states, and a body of rules governing inter-government relations and conflicts), their primary purpose and legitimating goal was to benefit and further the interests of imperial cores, not to serve the general interest of the community of states. Such private benefits were central to building support for imperial endeavors within metropolitan publics, without which empires could not function.²⁸ The gradual delegitimation of empire that accompanied the rise of sovereignty and the formal legal equality among states that this introduced transformed the types of power inequalities considered legitimate within world affairs. Sovereign equality has implied a world in which legitimate hierarchical power exercised across states, in order to avoid the appearance of empire, must be seen as serving goals of self-preservation or the provision of public goods rather than primarily serving goals of self-aggrandizement or private ends. It is here where the unilateral exercise of hierarchical power and the use of hierarchical power toward private ends (rather than for self-

²⁷Ferguson 2004.

²⁸Coyne and Davies 2007.

defense, multilateral action, or the provision of public goods) provide opportunities for analogy with the self-aggrandizing behavior long associated with traditional empires.

Equally important in transforming empire into a practice of generalized disrepute was the rise of ideologies of national self-determination. Principles of state sovereignty when extended globally limited the legitimacy of conquering existing states but did not overtly justify decolonization or the breakup of European empires. At the same time, some have considered the rise of self-determination norms to be a “second revolution in sovereignty,”²⁹ largely because of the anti-imperial focus that these two principles shared. The right to self-determination is frequently framed as an issue of the violated sovereignty of a national state that once existed (often, in the distant past) but no longer exists. Sometimes, fictitious associations of peoples with historical states are invented so as to strengthen claims to self-determination and to place them on an equal level with sovereignty claims.

The American Revolution first proffered the idea that the natural rights of peoples could limit the sovereignty of empire. The notion subsequently spread throughout the Americas and Europe, gaining particular force against European overland empires in the nineteenth century and becoming the basis for the ideologies of national self-determination that proved so destructive of empire in the twentieth century. Formal empire was often counterposed to the nation as a legitimating principle of politics, which made it difficult for formal empires to gain authority among their culturally-distinct subjects or to justify imperial rule over others to their own citizens. As belief in the nation spread, empires found themselves dealing with mobilized communities that proved vastly more expensive and troublesome to control, often to the point

²⁹Philpott 2001, 153-155.

where national resistance to empire generated increasing anti-imperial opposition within imperial cores themselves.³⁰ As an anti-imperial principle, national self-determination gained formal international recognition in the twentieth century—at first as a means for governing the break-up of European overland empires defeated in World War I, and subsequently with the rise of anti-colonial movements and decolonization. Indeed, as we saw, it was precisely at these moments that empire transformed predominately into a pejorative in political discourse.

Norms against alien rule came to be institutionalized in international law during the Cold War, though in highly qualified terms. The 1960 United Nations’ “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples,” for instance, condemned “the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination, and exploitation” as “a denial of fundamental human rights,” proclaimed the right of all peoples to self-determination, and noted that the end of colonialism is “irresistible and irreversible.”³¹ Numerous other statements have occurred since then. In practice, self-determination has taken back seat to sovereignty and has been largely confined to groups in formal colonial situations or experiencing foreign military occupations.³² Nevertheless, international norms of self-determination have helped to redefine the nature of the imperial, not only by rendering formal colonies illegal, but also by focusing attention on national resistance as a natural and expected reaction to empire. Indeed, in contrast to empire in a pre-national world, empire today has come to be conceived of as form of usurpation of the nation and is identified in large part by the degree of national resistance that it encounters.

³⁰Robinson 1979.

³¹United Nations Resolution #1514, “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples,” adopted on December 14, 1960.

³²Cassese 1995.

Thus, the rise of robust norms of state sovereignty and self-determination altered the politics of empire in two fundamental ways. First, they altered considerably the practices and behaviors associated with empire. We have suggested that anti-imperial norms of sovereignty and self-determination established certain standards and expectations of behavior for the powerful (such as no formal colonies, the use of force only in self-defense or for collective security, the mutability of state boundaries only with a state's consent, the recognition of the state as arbiter of last resort on its territory within the limits of international law, the exercise of hegemonic power for self-preservation or the provision of public goods rather than mere self-aggrandizement or private ends, and the absence of extensive national resistance to control) which, in their violation, have come to assume the label of "imperial." Second, as our content analysis suggested, these norms were associated with a drastic change in the values attached to empire. Empire has come to carry a near-universal negative connotation—irrespective of the practices that go by that name. Today no state today would openly admit to being an empire or claim to be pursuing imperial ends. Despite some attempts by some neo-conservative foreign policy analysts to paint American empire in positive and neutral terms, in sharp contrast to the past the prevailing understanding of empire throughout the world today is pejorative. Empire is a negative status ascribed to states by others rather than a positive or neutral label that states would ascribe to themselves. In short, empire has become a form of bad reputation.

Conceptualizing Imperial Reputation

We define imperial reputation as collective beliefs among those subject to control or among third-party observers about the imperial character of a state that is rooted at least in part in the past behavior of that state. A reputation is a form of dispositional explanation in which the

type or character of an actor, extrapolated from past behavior, is said to account for the actor's present or future behavior.³³ Four features are critical to understanding how reputations function: 1) their linkage with widely-held public norms; 2) the grounding of characterizations about the nature or type of an agent in a history of that agent's past behavior; 3) the important role of communications systems in establishing and maintaining reputations; and 4) the dynamic character of reputations and the process by which new and old evidence are weighted in assessing their reliability.

Reputations are rooted in public norms about socially desirable conduct.³⁴ This is essentially what is meant by good or bad reputation—that is, a propensity to act in accordance with or in violation of what others regard as appropriate behavior.³⁵ As Axelrod noted, reputation functions as “an important, and often dominant, reason to respect a norm,” for violating a norm provides “a signal about the type of person you are,”³⁶ and therefore can influence the way in which people behave toward you in future interactions. We have argued that empire has become a form of bad reputation whose near-universal negative evaluation derives from perceived deviance from anti-imperial norms that grew hegemonic during the Cold War—specifically, norms concerning colonialism, gross violations of sovereignty and self-determination, the presence of extensive national resistance to alien rule, the purposes and modes

³³Mercer 1996.

³⁴Conte and Paolucci 2002, 1.

³⁵We define norm here as a rule of behavior that people follow for some reason other than the fear of legal sanction. See Stout 2006, 15.

³⁶Axelrod 1986, 1107.

underlying the exercise of hegemonic power, and the illegitimate use of force by powerful states within the international arena.

Reputations are based at least in part on real observed past behavior and are embodiments of an actual history. Without being grounded in a series of concrete behaviors, the characterization of the actor represented by a reputation would simply not be believable. Rational choice theory encourages us to construe reputation as an emergent property of repeated interaction. In the language of Bayesian inference and of game theory, an actor's future behavior is derived as a probability assessment of the history of an actor's past behavior. Reputations thus provide "strong inter-temporal links along a sequence of otherwise independent situations," and in so doing potentially shape expectations of behavior in ways that differ from what would have been the case if situations were taken in complete isolation from one another.³⁷ Looked at as an emergent property of iterative behavior, the concept of imperial reputation pushes us to think about what states concretely do to gain reputations as empires rather than thinking about empire merely as a reflection of static structural attributes (for example, size, power, or hierarchy) or as disconnected from concrete behaviors. As we will see further below, popular conceptualizations of empire today bundle particular attributes of the powerful with specific behaviors that violate normative ways in which the powerful are expected to behave.

But while rooted in a behavioral history, reputations also have a constructed dimension to them.³⁸ Here, we concur with the approach of "cautious naturalism" to reputations advocated by

³⁷Wilson 1985, 27-28.

³⁸Klein 1997, 3-4; Fine 2001, 17.

Fine³⁹ in which reputations are based in real streams of behavior, but are also shaped through communications networks. An obvious example is the reputational ranking system for university departments, which ranks departments according to opinions solicited from department chairs. There is a notoriously subjective quality to them. Yet, they do broadly reflect some objective patterns of difference. A “cautious naturalism” with regard to reputation rejects both a crude objectivism (i.e., reputations are mere reflections of an actor’s behavior or qualities) and a purely constructivist approach (i.e., reputations are mere cultural objects and have no connection to reality) and seeks to probe sociologically how these dimensions of reputation interact.

In this respect, communication networks are critical to reputation-making. At the village level individual reputations are formed through networks of gossip, and a person’s reputation can be identified through what is said about him.⁴⁰ At the societal and inter-societal levels, they are formed within complex networks of communication, as reputational entrepreneurs use media to establish the character of targets with whom they do or do not identify. Studies have shown, for instance, that access to television and the internet is one of the strongest predictors of American imperial reputation.⁴¹ It is not unusual for reputations to be contested, and actors can have conflicting reputations among different groups, even on the basis of the same record of behavior. As the Soviet experience suggests, in a context in which states instinctively deny imperial intent, imperial reputation is invariably contested and gains stable, universalized form

³⁹Fine 2001; see also Sharman 2007.

⁴⁰Hutson 1971, 79.

⁴¹Shanahan and Nisbet 2007.

only in the wake of state collapse or the retreat of state power.⁴² Given that reputations can be an asset for those exercising or challenging authority, self-interested parties usually engage in efforts to shape reputations to their advantage. Following McAdam's observation that legacies of anti-Americanism in peripheral countries depend on their "fit" with existing political and social cleavages,⁴³ we anticipate that given many developing countries' shared history of colonization, anti-imperial communication often provides a particularly potent framing device by which to mobilize sentiment in pursuit of leaders' domestic or foreign policy objectives.

Posner has written that "failure to conform to relevant social norms raises suspicions about one's character and reliability in relations of trust."⁴⁴ In this respect, the dynamics of bad reputation differ from those of good reputation. Good reputations are fragile in that even one act can be enough to change a good reputation to a bad reputation and to undermine the capacity to trust. By contrast, bad reputations, once established, are "stickier" than good reputations (i.e., they persist long after those acts that give rise to reputation). People expect the worst from someone with a bad reputation, and it often takes a chain of "out-of-character" actions to prove that the character of the agent has changed before people are willing to trust an agent with a bad reputation.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, even bad reputations can change. In the rationalist tradition, reputational change is driven by the degree of uncertainty about an agent's preferences. Tomz emphasizes the role of incomplete information about state preferences as critical to his dynamic theory of reputation, with lenders continually updating the reputations of creditors based on

⁴²Suny 1995.

⁴³McAdam 2006.

⁴⁴Posner 2000, 13.

⁴⁵Hardin 2002.

ongoing behavior, and out-of-character behavior causing states to revise previous understandings.⁴⁶ It is possible, for instance, for states to overcome an imperial reputation by engaging in behavior that is out-of-keeping with the expectations others hold about empires. A number of states have largely shed their imperial reputations—often in the wake of regime change, large-scale contraction, or foreign occupation as a result of loss in war. In many of these cases, a sharp reduction in capabilities and a contraction of the sphere of control was accompanied by prolonged “out-of-character” behavior that altered perceptions of the imperial intentions of these states. But even in these cases, the process of overcoming imperial reputation usually stretched over a considerable period of time, and residual pockets of anti-imperial sentiment and mobilization persist in a number of cases.

We argue that the durability of a state’s imperial reputation depends on the interaction of three factors: the extent to which a state’s ongoing actions are “in character” with what others expect from a state harboring imperial preferences, the degree of certainty that observers and those who have been subjected to control have about the state’s preferences, and how trustworthy or reliable they consider new information indicating out-of-character behavior to be. Given the severity of the experiences associated with being subject to alien domination, citizens in a dominated state or community may feel that their past experience provides more reliable information about preferences than any out-of-character behavior in which the state may engage and may harbor relatively little uncertainty about the dominant state’s preferences. Thus, in contrast to Tomz,⁴⁷ we argue that reputation as an imputed disposition based on past behavior can function in an environment where new evidence about a dominant state’s out-of-character

⁴⁶Tomz 2007. See also Kreps and Wilson 1982.

⁴⁷Tomz 2007, 18.

behavior may be heavily discounted, so that an imperial reputation is likely to be considerably more durable than, for instance, a reputation for defaulting on one's debts. America's imperial reputation, for instance, has been a relatively fixed feature of its relationship with Latin America for a century-and-a-half,⁴⁸ rooted in a real history of American actions in the region, but also reproduced through narratives that are part of broader belief systems. Similar processes have occurred with regard to post-Soviet Russia's imperial reputation in Eastern Europe and in a number of the post-Soviet states. In these cases, the ability of a hegemon to overcome its imperial reputation is more difficult than would be the case under pure Bayesian assumptions. Thus, we would expect imperial reputation as a form of bad reputation to be relatively "sticky," though the degree to which it persists is likely to depend on the extent to which states engage in "in-character" imperial behavior and whether others act on assumptions of imperfect information (i.e., are open to learning from a state's out-of-character behavior) or assumptions closer to perfect information (i.e., a state's imperial reputation is deeply institutionalized within key belief systems).

Whether imperial reputation entails steep costs for a state can also vary. Within the rational choice literature reputation is critical to the establishment of social order through the incentives and disincentives for future cooperation that it creates. It has been likened to an "invisible eye" that enforces voluntary good conduct in the absence of coercion or immediate material incentive;⁴⁹ those who violate norms repeatedly are supposed to be punished reputationally through others' behavior toward them in future interactions—not simply through the immediate costs that may be imposed by present behavior. In this respect, one might

⁴⁸McPherson 2003.

⁴⁹Ben-Porath 1980.

conclude that, as a form of bad reputation in the contemporary world, it is in the long-term interest of present-day states to avoid gaining an imperial reputation. Since empire is widely understood in practical discourse today as a form of illegitimate rule, a state that has gained a widespread reputation as empire might be expected to experience greater resistance and thus higher costs of maintaining control.

Nevertheless, there are circumstances under which powerful states might choose to bear the reputational costs associated with imperial behaviors, even while seeking to minimize their imperial reputations and whatever negative effects might flow from them. The benefits associated with imperial behaviors can often outweigh the costs involved, including reputational costs. For example, a particular regime may find that imperial behavior strengthens a sense of pride and identification with the regime among domestic audiences, despite whatever retaliation or negative disrepute imperial behaviors may foster. States can also gain significant material benefits (such as access to resources, markets, or military bases) from imperial behaviors that might outweigh the costs emerging from direct resistance or reputational loss. Neo-realist theories would lead one to expect that when a state engages in imperial behaviors, it should elicit balancing behavior and sanctioning by other states. But third-party actors opposing imperial policies may be discouraged by the extent of imperial power or may experience collective action problems. This is more likely in a unipolar context in which significant disparities in power confront those opposing imperial behaviors and no counter-hegemon capable of helping opponents overcome collective action barriers exists.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Wohlforth 1999; Brooks and Wohlforth 2005; Downs and Jones 2002.

In addition to rising costs of control due to resistance, bad reputation can also engender significant costs in terms of future cooperation. Generally, for reputation to have a constraining effect on an agent, the agent must first realize that current actions affect the subsequent beliefs of other participants in ongoing interactions, their expectations about his or her future behavior, and ultimately their choice of actions in ways that can negatively influence future desired outcomes. The agent thus must have a long-term time horizon, creating an incentive “to trade off the immediate consequences of his current decision against the long-term effects on his reputation.”⁵¹ When leaders of states are focused on the immediate benefits that might accrue from imperial behaviors rather than the long-term effects of imperial behavior on obtaining cooperation, imperial reputation is unlikely to exert restraint on imperial ambition.

It may also be that, in some circumstances, states may judge the reputational costs associated with imperial behaviors to be short-lived and therefore tolerable. Game-theoretic analyses of reputation assume perfect recall among players, so that no player ever forgets what other players have done.⁵² As Tomz notes, this is not an entirely realistic assumption.⁵³ When dealing with a powerful actor with much to offer, there may be considerable incentive to forget. In general, the longer the time from the pattern of behavior that gave rise to imperial reputation, the less robust the imperial reputation is likely to be. Thus, while imperial reputation is “sticky,” it can also be expected to decay gradually over the long run unless additional cause materializes. Where national resistance to foreign power is strong, however, reputational entrepreneurs usually intervene to ensure that past imperial behaviors are not forgotten and are institutionalized

⁵¹Wilson 1985, 59.

⁵²Wilson 1986, 60.

⁵³Tomz 2007.

within collective memory;⁵⁴ these memories may then be activated later when opportunity or fresh grievance materializes.

For all these reasons, the direct costs imposed by imperial reputation can often be insufficient to dissuade powerful states that have pro-imperial domestic constituencies, display short-term time horizons, believe that opponents will bandwagon or experience collective action problems, or judge the reputational effects to be short-lived from engaging in imperial behaviors. Even in these cases, though, within the contemporary anti-imperial normative context the offending state almost invariably seeks to minimize whatever reputational costs arise by denying imperial intent and framing actions as being in accord with prevailing international norms. But while imperial reputation may not in most circumstances be costly enough to cause states to roll back imperial undertakings, there are ways in which imperial reputation can indirectly exert pressure on states—even to the point of causing them to alter policies.

For one thing, bad reputation can undermine the effectiveness of power by giving rise to foot-dragging by reluctant allies and making it more difficult to locate parties willing to cooperate in future endeavors. For example, firms targeted by the Security and Exchanges Commission (SEC) for financial misrepresentation of their accounts have been shown to suffer losses in future lowered sales and higher contracting costs that were more than seven times any direct penalties that had been imposed by the SEC.⁵⁵ In the case of Soviet rule over Eastern Europe, finding locals who were willing to cooperate with the regime and who were reliable often proved difficult. In the case of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, the United States was

⁵⁴Schwartz 2000.

⁵⁵Karpoff, Lee, and Martin 2006.

only able to find four countries willing to contribute troops to its “Coalition of the Willing,” and major American allies (such as Germany and France) refused to participate. Thus, a state that relies on the cooperation of others in order to achieve its goals would likely seek to avoid an imperial reputation. There may also be externalities to imperial reputation, such as a tendency of some states to emulate imperial behavior. Studies have shown that, when short-run participants in a competitive game do not adjust their behavior in line with or care to learn about a long-run player’s actual pattern of behavior (i.e., behavior shaped by reputational concerns), there are incentives for the long-run player to disregard reputation,⁵⁶ leading to opportunistic behavior. One of the consequences of imperial behavior therefore may be to encourage other states similarly to set aside reputational concerns.

Finally, another potentially significant reputational effect revolves around the moral consequences of living with a bad reputation within the population of the offending state. Studies have shown that, particularly in settings where people meet face-to-face, most people have an innate need to be held in good esteem by their neighbors.⁵⁷ The mechanisms involved were aptly identified by Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: “We desire both to be respectable, and to be respected. We dread both to be contemptible, and to be contemned.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶Ely and Valimaki 2003.

⁵⁷Blaxter 1971, 137. Both the rational choice and ethnographic literatures on reputation agree that thick relationships (involving more intense and interdependent interactions) are more likely to generate reputational effects, since repeated interaction generates incentives to maintain a good reputation among those on whom an actor depends (See Coleman 1990; Hardin 2002; Bailey 1971, 4). In this respect, in a context in which empire is widely understood as a pejorative, imperial policies are likely to generate lower reputational costs when a metropolitan population does not interact widely with populations abroad—one reason why closed societies might enjoy distinct advantages in the politics of imperialism over open societies.

⁵⁸Smith 1813, vol. 1, 131-132.

Rational choice theorists emphasize the material costs and benefits that accrue from future cooperation flowing from reputation. Smith, by contrast, argued that the effect of reputation was also rooted in our inherent need to be held in esteem by others—a need that, in his opinion, could only be prudently satisfied through the pursuit of virtue. Opposition to the Iraq war within the United States has focused not only on the enormous financial costs of the war, the failure to create a stable Iraq, and the deaths and injuries to American servicemen, but also on how the war has affected perceptions of America abroad. Public opinion polls have documented the importance of the desire within the American public to be held in esteem abroad. A 2006 World Public Opinion poll, for example, found that 87 percent of Americans surveyed believed that it was important “for people in other countries to feel goodwill toward the United States.”⁵⁹ This desire to restore American reputation abroad became important in the foreign policy debates surrounding the 2008 elections and arguments for withdrawal from Iraq.⁶⁰ Thus, states able to insulate their populations from negative characterizations of their actions by others or to insulate themselves from the negative opinions of their own populations are more capable of engaging in prolonged imperial policies.

The Structure of American Imperial Reputation

We suggested earlier that the consolidation of anti-imperial international norms in the second half of the twentieth century undermined many of the specific practices traditionally associated with empire, but also established certain standards and expectations of behavior for the powerful which, in their violation, have come to define the nature of the “imperial” in the contemporary world. As a test of this proposition, we turn to a more thorough analysis of the

⁵⁹See http://www.americans-world.org/digest/overview/us_role/worldopinion.cfm.

⁶⁰See, for instance, Albright 2008.

components of American imperial reputation during the late 1990s and the early years of Bush administration.

Public opinion data on how publics around the world have reacted to American foreign policy during the Bush years are of course abundant, and often relate specifically to characteristics that publics may well categorize as imperial. For example, a March 2004 Pew survey found that, in seven of nine countries surveyed (in Russia, France, Germany, Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco, and Jordan, but not in the United States and Great Britain) majorities believed that American foreign policy was motivated by the desire to control Middle East oil, while majorities in five of those nine countries (France, Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco, and Jordan) believed that the U.S. was motivated by goals of world domination. Similarly, a Pew survey in 2005 found that solid majorities in twelve out of sixteen countries surveyed objected to American unilateralism.⁶¹ However, rarely do such surveys directly ask questions about American imperial reputation or connect opinions on specific issues to larger characterizations of American power. In the few cases in which such questions were asked during the Bush years, as we saw earlier, majorities did characterize American power as imperial, even among the publics of America's allies and Americans themselves. Nevertheless, precisely what practices and features people had in mind when they characterized American power as "imperial" remains unclear.

To probe this issue, we investigated the attributes associated with the growth of American imperial reputation during the Bush years through a content analysis of media representations of American empire. Toward these ends, we used *World News Connection*, a

⁶¹Kohut 2006, 169 and 174-175.

U.S. government publication that translates news articles from around the world, in order to construct a sample of references to contemporary states or international organizations as examples of empire, imperialism, or colonialism. In all, we identified 2,287 articles in *World News Connection* from 1996 through 2003 in which a contemporary state or international organization was referred to as imperial or colonial. Of these, 1,337 (58 percent) were directed toward the United States—by far, the most frequent of any state.⁶² Of course, this sample of references to the United States as empire is neither representative of world public opinion nor an entirely random sample of global media representations. *World News Connection* selects articles for inclusion specifically because of their potential interest to the U.S. government. Moreover, certain regions of the world are covered in greater depth than others, and coverage varies considerably over time depending on world events. Nevertheless, for our purposes these issues did not matter, since there was no reason to believe that articles were or were not included because of their reference to the United States as imperial or because of the particular features that they associated with American imperialism. The articles reflect a broad range of countries, cultures, and writers. In all, authors come from 76 countries of the world, with 25 percent (334) written by authors from NATO countries, 31 percent (409) by authors from the Middle East, 12 percent (160) by authors from communist countries, 17 percent (221) by authors from South or Southeast Asia, 7 percent (92) by authors from Latin America and only 2 percent (32) by authors from Africa. After coding information on the source, the speaker, and the specifics of the

⁶²Another 341 (15) percent of imperial references were directed against post-Soviet Russia, and the remainder were applied to 40 other countries or international organizations. *World News Connection* does not cover the American, British, or Canadian media.

relationships referred to as imperial, the articles were coded for references to twenty-five different attributes that potentially might be associated with empire.⁶³

Figure 3 demonstrates the sharp rise in accusations of American empire across the early years of the Bush administration, with the number of articles making these accusations more than tripling in 2003 alone. This rise in media representations of American empire occurred across all categories of speakers—even among America’s NATO allies (whose frequency of representations of American empire also tripled in 2003). These findings closely parallel those of Kohut in a similar temporal tracking of references to “American empire” in the U.S. media.⁶⁴ As the figure also shows, the sharp rise in representations of American empire cannot be explained as a result of sampling bias, since the temporal patterns do not match shifts in the overall pool of articles from which these examples were culled.

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

We were interested primarily in the features that were most frequently identified in these articles as attributes of American empire. Table 1 reports the raw frequencies by which particular attributes appeared. Several facts stand out. First, to confirm the obvious, the practices that have traditionally defined empires—territorial aggrandizement and population settlement—have little to do with contemporary accusations of American empire. As Nye observed, “The United States is certainly not an empire in the way we think of the European overseas empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”⁶⁵ Second, as structural approaches

⁶³The authors are grateful to Mark Schrad for the collection and coding of the data.

⁶⁴Kohut 2006, 10.

⁶⁵Nye 2004, 136.

to empire would anticipate,⁶⁶ hierarchical subordination and power differentials are the most frequently mentioned attributes associated with American empire, mentioned in 88 and 78 percent of articles respectively. When people talk about American empire today, a fundamental structural component rooted in hierarchy is at least part of what they have in mind. Third, as the sample also shows, hierarchy is not the only feature widely associated with American empire. Also frequently mentioned are a series of specific actions, manners of behaving, motivations, and oppositions: violence and aggression; resistance to control; ambitions and pretensions; violation of sovereignty and self-determination; provocation and destabilization; unilateralism; and military occupation. Thus, hierarchical structural differentiation may be a necessary component of empire, but we would argue that it is not a sufficient marker of empire. There are also particular behaviors that are widely associated with empire and that co-vary with representations of empire's core structural features.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

To probe how structural and behavioral features vary together in these representations, we performed an exploratory factor analysis on fourteen of the most frequently occurring attributes.⁶⁷ Exploratory factor analysis is used to uncover latent variables that cannot be

⁶⁶Lake 2007.

⁶⁷Not all twenty-five characteristics measured in the content analysis could be included in the factor analysis for several reasons. A good factor analysis ideally includes a large number of variables, but these variables must have reasonable reliabilities and good communalities in order to factor cleanly into a smaller number of components. Not all the attributes measured in our sample met these criteria. Thus, as recommended in a number of sources, we proceeded stepwise, examining first the obvious candidates for elimination, the obvious candidates for inclusion, and then all others on a case-by-case basis. We began by eliminating attributes with extremely low frequencies in the content analysis, with low reliabilities, or that displayed high multi-collinearity with other attributes. Ten characteristics in the content analysis were eliminated as a result of these criteria. We then looked at those characteristics in the content analysis whose inclusion was most defensible due to their high frequencies and the range of

observed directly and to explore what observed variables share in common, thereby facilitating theoretical interpretation of complex data. Since the data we collected on attributes associated with American imperialism were binary in character, we used tetrachoric correlations rather than Pearson correlations for the factor analysis (see Table 2).⁶⁸ Analysis of the eigenvalues (Table 3), which reflect the amount of variance in the total sample explained by each potential factor, points to the presence of three underlying factors within the data. Using the Kaiser criterion for identifying the number of underlying factors in a sample, three eigenvalues had scores greater than 1, in all accounting for 97 percent of the variance. A scree plot of the eigenvalues indicated the presence of a possible fourth factor, but when tested, only one attribute (human rights violations/absence of democracy) loaded moderately high on this factor. Since common factor analysis requires several variables to load uniquely high on any single underlying factor, we assumed a structure of three underlying factors to the sample.⁶⁹ As Table 4 shows, when the

ideas that they encompassed. This produced a list of nine characteristics, and a preliminary analysis showed that these factored cleanly into two or three components. The remaining six characteristics were then carefully examined for their capacity also to factor cleanly into two or three components or to represent an additional component together with other variables, their effects having been examined separately, together, and in all possible combinations. Of these six, five were included by these criteria, leaving a final list of 14 attributes from the content analysis for inclusion in the factor analysis.

⁶⁸Tetrachoric correlation assumes that dichotomous variables are reflective of underlying continuous variables—a reasonable assumption in this case for attributes of imperialism. The common factor analysis was carried out using STATA’s principal factors analysis method, with varimax orthogonal rotation.

⁶⁹The presence of a Heywood case in the matrix when four factors are extracted complicated the use of maximum likelihood for determining the statistical significance of any more than three factors in the sample (Three factors proved to be statistically significant). Heywood cases, in which the estimates of the uniqueness of a variable on the latent factors are zero or negative, are common in factor analysis and are often caused when two or fewer variables load high on a factor. While inspection of the residuals matrix indicates that a fourth underlying factor cannot be ruled out, when a fourth factor is included in the analysis, only one variable (human rights violations/absence of democracy) loads relatively high on this factor—lending credence to a three-factor structure (See McDonald 1985, 78-81). The presence of a fourth factor also causes the military occupation variable to load perfectly on the first factor, producing zero uniqueness

sample is divided into three factors, each factor loads uniquely high on particular attributes (i.e., is highly correlated with a particular cluster of attributes), with only one complex variable (violence and aggression) loading high on both the first and third factors.⁷⁰ In other words, media representations of American empire cluster around three relatively distinct models of the imperial.

[TABLES 2, 3, AND 4 HERE]

The first model, which explains 35 percent of the common variance, loads high on military occupation, violation of sovereignty and self-determination, violence and aggression, human rights violations and absence of democracy, and evoking resistance. Accordingly, we have interpreted this model as *forceful subjugation of society*—a concept that could apply either to the forceful subjugation of a country through foreign military occupation (as in the American invasion of Iraq, the main example cited in this sample) or to the forceful subjugation of a national group within a country.⁷¹ Violation of sovereignty and self-determination norms receives the highest factor loading of all attributes within this model, suggesting again the important role played by anti-imperial international norms within contemporary understandings of empire. Also significant is the way in which both oppression and resistance are integral

for that variable and creating a Heywood case. When a fourth factor is included in the analysis, it is correlated with whether the speaker was from a communist country or movement, suggesting that if a fourth factor loading high on human rights violations/absence of democracy indeed exists, it likely represents highly propagandistic deployments of anti-imperial rhetoric rather than a broader latent structure within the data.

⁷⁰The rotated factor matrix also comes close to approximating the criteria for a simple structure factor pattern, in which each variable has nonzero loadings on as few factors as possible (See McDonald 1985, 81-84).

⁷¹A separate factor analysis of Russian imperial reputation as exhibited in media representations (not reported here) showed a similar model of imperial reputation associated with Russian behavior in Chechnya.

aspects of the model, so that protracted violence and resistance are taken as hallmarks of illegitimate occupation.

The second model, which accounts for 32 percent of the common variance in the sample, loads high on unilateral action, the exercise of power, hierarchical subordination, the imposition of order, global scope, and harboring ambitions and pretensions. This model, which we have called *unilateral hierarchy*, is distinct from the first in that the arbitrary and self-serving exercise of hegemonic power constitutes the chief complaint associating the imperial label with American policy. Earlier, we discussed how sovereign equality altered understandings of legitimate hierarchy in international affairs and undermined the notion that powerful states could impose their will unilaterally on others in pursuit of private ends and in opposition to multilateral or international institutions. As Walt has explained the rationale for why multilateralism has been important for the exercise of American power abroad, “the United Nations and other international institutions help the United States exercise its power in a way that is less threatening (and therefore more acceptable) to others.”⁷² American unilateralism occurred across multiple policy arenas under the Bush administration (such as in non-participation in the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Protocol, a self-serving interpretation of the Geneva Conventions on the detention of enemy combatants and the use of torture, conditionality on the payment of UN dues, withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, refusal to participate in treaties on land mines and prohibitions on biological weapons, and, of course, the Iraq invasion), undermining the multilateral international order in pursuit of private ends rather

⁷²Walt 2002, 143.

than public goods,⁷³ and thereby violating expectations of how the powerful should behave in a world of sovereign equality.

A third model of American empire, which is roughly as prevalent as the first two, concerns norms against the *illegitimate use of force*. It loads high on violence and aggression, provocation, adventurism, and destabilization, illegality, and seeking control over resources, and is focused specifically on violation of international norms concerning military action against other states. A number of norms govern the use of force in international affairs—emerging, as we have seen, in large part to contain the threats posed by imperial ambition. Just war theorists since the eighteenth century have argued that unilateral force against other states should be used as a last resort only and for purposes of legitimate self-defense rather than self-aggrandizement. The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 unsurprisingly serves as the main event underpinning this model of empire. Accusations of American empire centered around the now-vindicated belief that Bush administration officials, long intent on cementing American influence in the Middle East via Iraq, did not exhaust opportunities for peaceful resolution prior to the invasion and did not sufficiently establish the presence of a threat posed by Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.⁷⁴ While the Bush Doctrine proclaimed America’s right to pre-emptive warfare in order to contain terrorist threats, it also declared its right to overthrow “rogue” states engaged in the production of weapons of mass destruction and to take military action in order to maintain American predominance—goals which were highly controversial in terms of their standing within international law. Moreover, the close links between members of the Bush administration and the oil industry and the quick use of troops to guard Iraqi oil facilities lent credence to suspicions

⁷³Brooks and Wohlforth 2005, 517.

⁷⁴See, for instance, Mann 2004, 235-238, 259, 300-301.

that control over Middle East oil (rather than self-defense against an Iraqi military threat) was the motivating purpose underlying the war.⁷⁵ Thus, as the combination of attributes in this model suggests, American use of force in Iraq fostered America's imperial reputation because of its provocative, destabilizing, and self-interested character and its contradiction of prevailing anti-imperial international norms on the legitimate use of force.

We believe that these models point to a larger logic underlying imperial reputation—one that is rooted not only in hierarchy, but also in aspects of behavior that stand in violation of prevailing anti-imperial norms. These models appeared in roughly similar form across a number of diverse cultural and political boundaries. In Table 5 we introduced dummy variables representing whether the media representation came from a speaker from a NATO country, the Middle East, or Latin America into the factor analysis; these three regions were selected because of their salience within American imperial reputation, the large numbers of articles from these regions in the sample, and their diverse relationships with the United States. If a dummy variable representing one of these regions loaded high (absolute value above .35) on any of the models, it would indicate that the model as it is specified in the factor analysis appears more or less frequently in that region than for the rest of the sample. Moreover, if the specific attributes associated with each model changed in the presence of a regional dummy variable, it would indicate that the content of these models varies across world regions. As the table shows, the models actually were quite stable across the three world regions, with similar attributes loading high and loading low in each. Moreover, the relative frequency of each model in media representations in NATO countries was similar to those coming from the Middle East, with dummy variables for the two regions loading low in all three models. In the case of Latin

⁷⁵Craig 2004, 155.

America the dummy variable loaded negatively high on the “forceful subjugation of society” model, indicating that this model appeared less frequently in Latin American representations of American empire than the other two models (the “unilateral hierarchy” model appeared most frequently in Latin America). We do not claim that representations of American empire are invariant across the globe or that all populations speak similarly or uniformly about American empire. However, the evidence indicates that the three models of American empire outlined here are present in similar form in the media representations from America’s NATO allies, the Middle East, and Latin America, with some regional variation in the frequency with which they appear. Moreover, these models represent bundles of structure, behaviors, and norms, pointing to the how any discussion of contemporary empire needs to move beyond a purely structural understanding and to engage as well those aspects that render hierarchy illegitimate.

[TABLE 5 HERE]

Conclusion: Empire and Imperial Reputation

We have laid out the case for imperial reputation as an object of extensive study and as an integral element of imperial phenomena. We have made clear that imperial reputation is not identical with empire, which includes both structural and behavioral components that need not always coincide neatly with the reputational dimension of empire. But we have claimed that reputation has become increasingly central to the politics of empire in a world in which states do not self-identify as empires in the presence of robust anti-imperial norms. The rise and consolidation of anti-imperial norms of state sovereignty and self-determination altered the practices and behaviors widely associated with empire and established certain standards and expectations of behavior for the powerful that, in their violation, have come to assume the label of “imperial.” Indeed, we have shown through the American case that while perceptions of

American empire are widespread (even among Americans themselves and among America's closest allies), the practices on which such perceptions are based are different than those that defined empires in the past. Nevertheless, there is a clear structure and logic related to the history of empires that underlies these perceptions—one that originated in the consolidation of anti-imperial norms within the international system, attaches itself to specific aspects of hegemonic behavior, and appears in similar form in vastly different cultural contexts.

As a form of bad reputation, imperial reputation in the contemporary world is “sticky” and likely to be shed only in the wake of a sharp reduction in capabilities, a contraction of the sphere of control, and/or prolonged “out-of-character” behavior. As the United States confronts the post-Bush era, it is likely to find that its imperial reputation will gradually decay only so long as it gives no fresh cause for grievance. As the United States has discovered, imperial reputation in a world in which empire is understood predominantly as a pejorative does entail reputational costs, although states do gain benefits from behaving “imperial” that can cause them to overlook these costs. But the importance of imperial reputation inheres not only in the politics that it evokes and the practical consequences that may flow from it, but also in its promise to inform our understanding of imperial phenomena in more analytically precise ways. Obviously, theoretical constructs must ultimately serve the purpose of analysis and should not merely mimic natural language usage. But the meaning and nature of political phenomena do evolve over time, and it is incumbent upon the researcher to adjust analytical categories to reflect these changes. If, for example, the three models of American empire outlined in this paper reflect pervasive and coherent social understandings of what it means to be an empire in a world in which empires do not openly proclaim themselves and conquest is no longer widely practiced, then they point us not only toward particular structural features characteristic of empire, but

toward specific behavioral and relational attributes as well. Thinking of empire in this way--as a bundle of structural, behavior, and relational elements--compels us to move beyond the mere facts of hierarchy, size, or power and to engage more directly the ways in which legitimate and illegitimate power are exercised across political and cultural boundaries.

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Figure 1. Tone of References to a Contemporary State as Imperial in *The New York Times*, 1900-2000

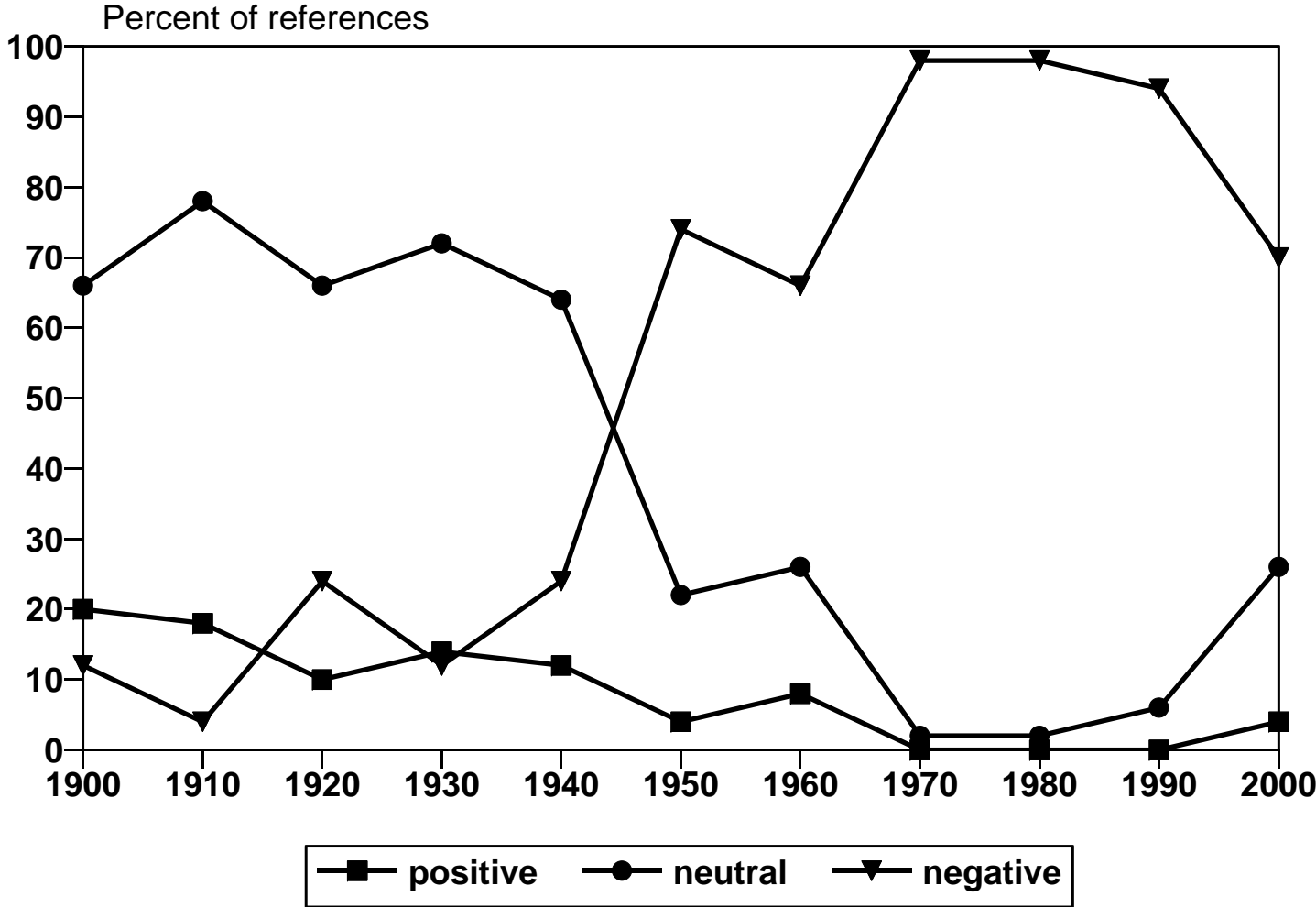


Figure 2. Frequency of References to a Contemporary State as Imperial in *The New York Times*, 1900-2000

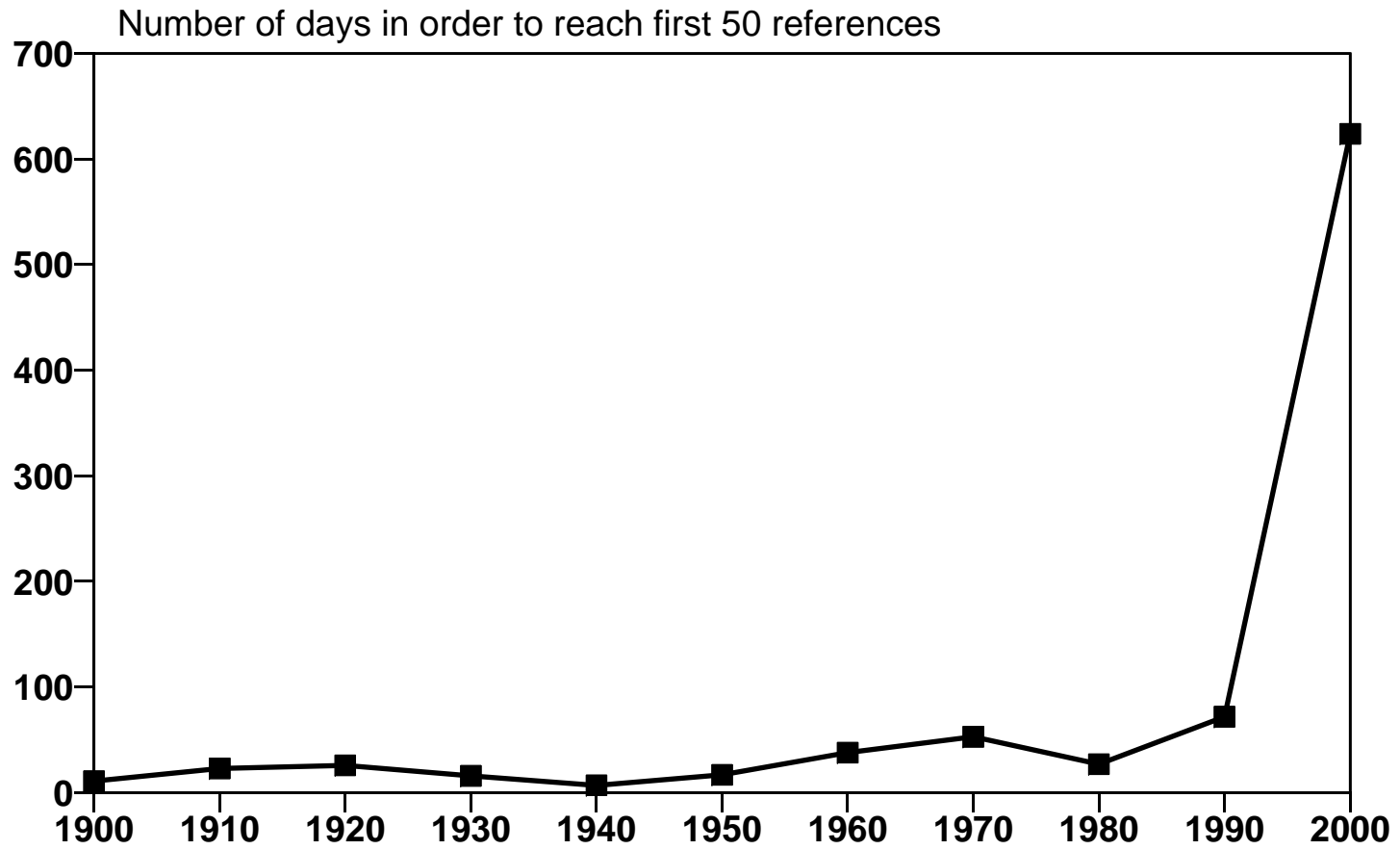


Figure 3. Country of Speaker in Media Representations of American Empire, by Year of Publication

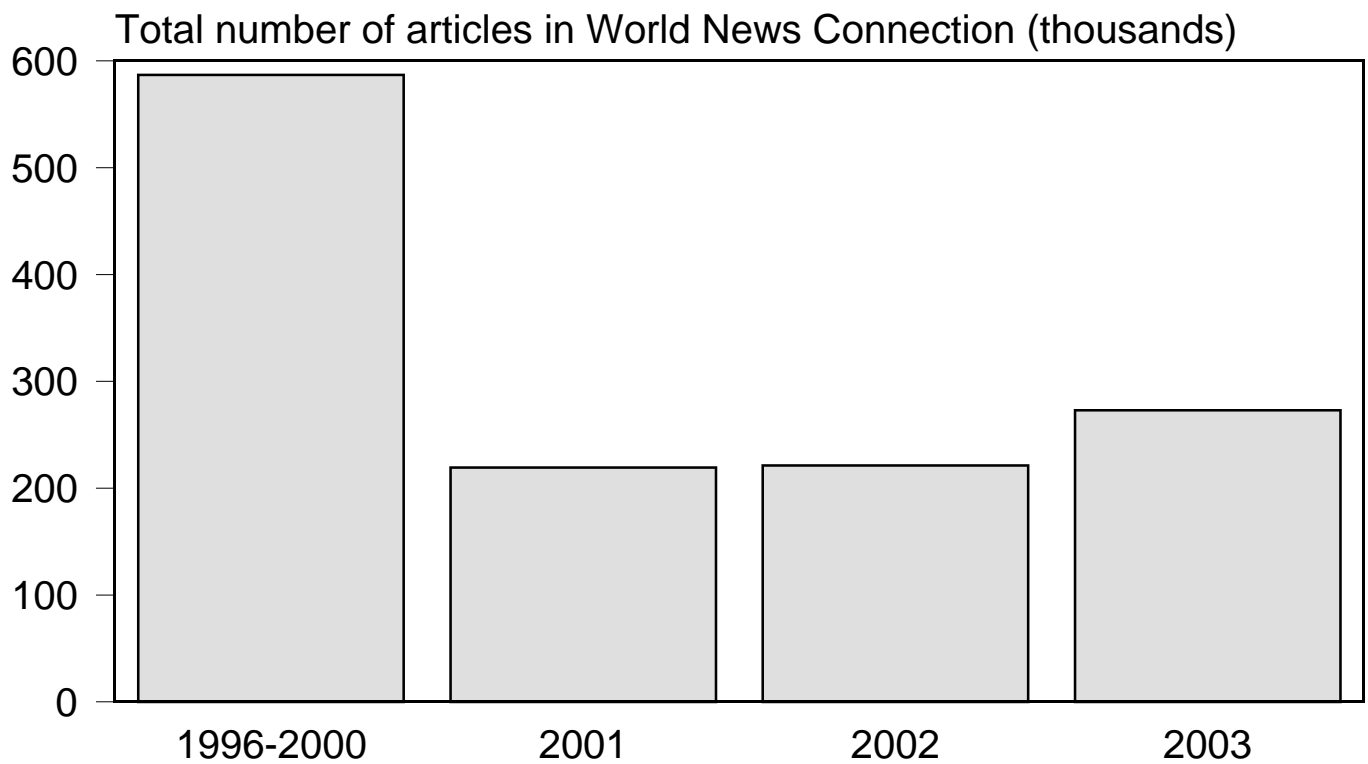
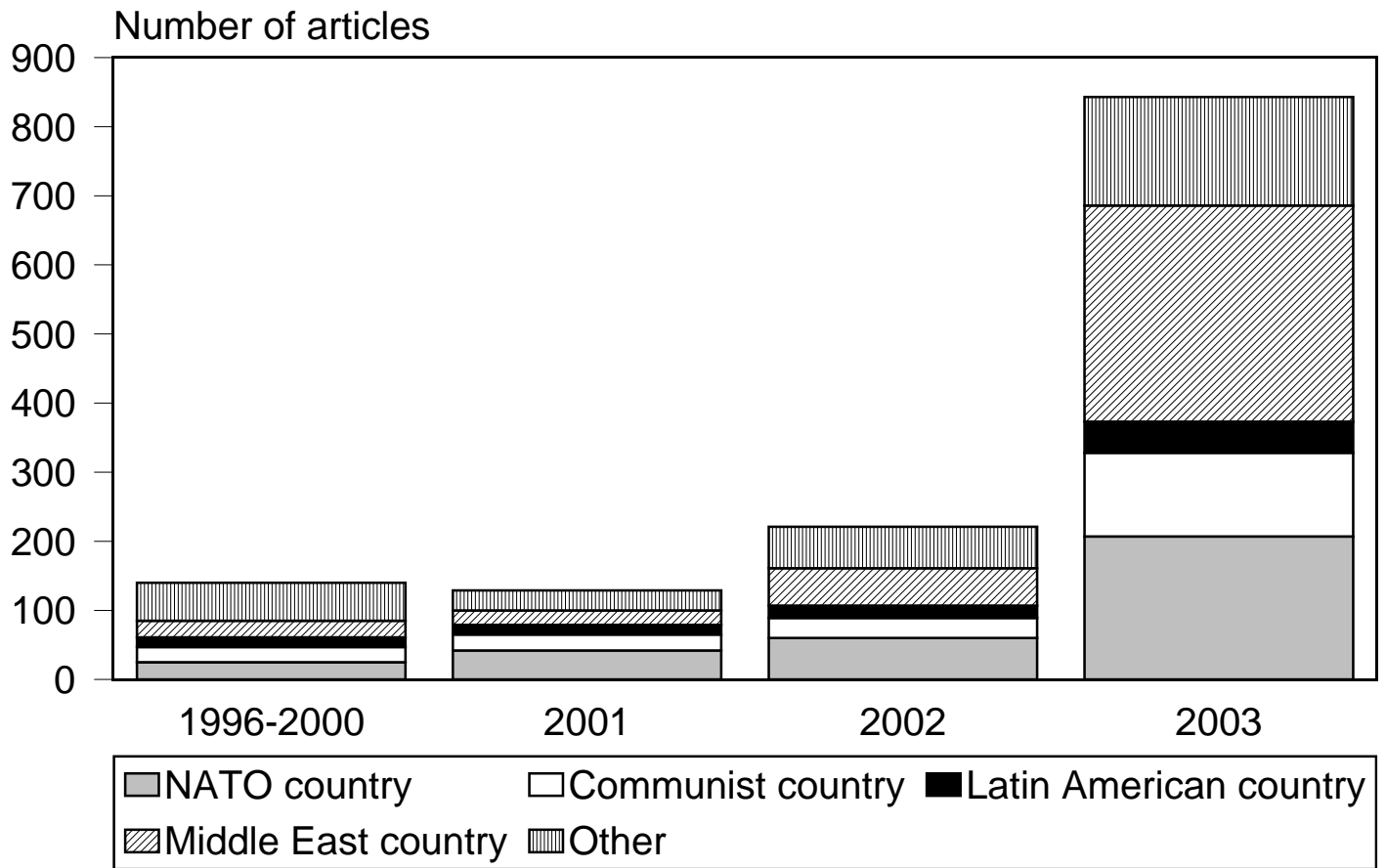


Table 1. Frequency of Characteristics Associated with American Empire

Characteristic	Number of articles	Percent of articles
Hierarchical subordination	1175	88
Having strength/power/influence	1048	78
Violence/aggression	923	69
Evoking resistance against	919	69
Harboring ambitions/pretensions/aspirations	873	65
Violation of sovereignty or self-determination	772	58
Provocation/adventurism/destabilization	679	51
Unilateral action	525	39
Military occupation	475	36
Global scope	463	35
Threats or pressure short of violence	428	32
Deception/concealment	406	30
Imposition of order	363	27
Human rights violations/absence of democracy	344	26
Seeking control over resources	330	25
Return to old	309	23
Illegality/violation of law	280	21
Newness	231	17
Instinctual/deeply embedded way of behaving	224	17
Evil/abnormality	191	14
Territorial dismemberment/partition	101	8
Theft of wealth or resources	66	5
Large size	51	4
Territorial aggrandizement	36	3
Population settlement	18	1
Total	1337	100

Table 2. Tetrachoric Correlation Matrix of Characteristics Associated with American Empire

	Having strength/power/influence	Global scope	Hierarchical subordination	Evoking resistance against	Harboring ambitions/prentensions/aspirations	Violence/aggression	Violation of sovereignty or self-determination	Provocation/adventurism/destabilization	Unilateral action	Military occupation	Human rights violations/absence of democracy	Illegality/violation of law	Establishment of order	Control over resources
Having strength/power/influence	1.00													
Global scope	0.30	1.00												
Hierarchical subordination	0.50	0.15	1.00											
Evoking resistance against	-0.04	-0.05	0.05	1.00										
Harboring ambitions/prentensions/aspirations	0.29	0.18	0.33	0.11	1.00									
Violence/aggression	-0.07	0.17	-0.12	0.47	0.08	1.00								
Violation of sovereignty or self-determination	0.09	-0.05	0.15	0.39	0.17	0.53	1.00							
Provocation/adventurism/destabilization	-0.14	0.14	-0.21	0.26	0.18	0.72	0.33	1.00						
Unilateral action	0.39	0.44	0.38	-0.04	0.43	0.14	0.06	0.23	1.00					
Military occupation	0.01	-0.04	0.03	0.36	-0.08	0.62	0.76	0.29	-0.06	1.00				
Human rights violations/absence of democracy	0.17	-0.03	0.24	0.30	0.16	0.34	0.41	0.17	0.15	0.19	1.00			
Illegality/violation of law	-0.10	0.06	-0.13	0.22	-0.01	0.39	0.25	0.36	0.19	0.23	0.32	1.00		
Establishment of order	0.37	0.48	0.14	0.02	0.17	0.25	0.24	0.17	0.43	0.22	0.05	0.06	1.00	
Control over resources	0.04	0.12	0.01	0.12	0.02	0.45	0.32	0.41	0.18	0.42	0.13	0.16	0.19	1.00

Table 3. Eigenvalues for Factor Analysis of Fourteen Attributes Associated With American Empire

Factor	Eigenvalue
Factor 1	3.39672
Factor 2	2.02394
Factor 3	1.02268
Factor 4	0.64812
Factor 5	0.25903
Factor 6	0.17254
Factor 7	0.10532
Factor 8	-0.00266
Factor 9	-0.10361
Factor 10	-0.11606
Factor 11	-0.14491
Factor 12	-0.15042
Factor 13	-0.20744
Factor 14	-0.24933

Table 4. Factor Structure of Media Representations of American Empire

	Rotated Factor Loadings (Orthogonal Varimax Rotation)			
	Factor 1: Forceful Subjugation of Society	Factor 2: Unilateral Hierarchy	Factor 3: The Illegitimate Use of Force	Uniqueness
Having strength/power/influence	0.0988	<u>0.6389</u>	-0.2219	0.5328
Global scope	-0.1591	<u>0.5398</u>	0.2684	0.6113
Hierarchical subordination	0.2136	<u>0.5618</u>	-0.3737	0.4990
Evoking resistance against	<u>0.4848</u>	-0.0402	0.1850	0.7292
Harboring ambitions/pretensions/aspirations	0.0873	<u>0.4965</u>	0.0177	0.7456
Violence/aggression	<u>0.5463</u>	0.0474	<u>0.7200</u>	0.1809
Violation of sovereignty or self-determination	<u>0.8261</u>	0.1006	0.1674	0.2795
Provocation/adventurism/destabilization	0.2206	0.0554	<u>0.7755</u>	0.3468
Unilateral action	-0.0366	<u>0.7269</u>	0.2137	0.4246
Military occupation	<u>0.7795</u>	-0.0637	0.2563	0.3227
Human rights violations/absence of democracy	<u>0.4831</u>	0.1833	0.0461	0.7309
Illegality/violation of law	0.2343	0.0055	<u>0.4038</u>	0.7821
Imposition of order	0.0919	<u>0.5426</u>	0.2513	0.6340
Seeking control over resources	0.3021	0.1196	<u>0.3963</u>	0.7373
Explained variance	2.34968	2.15357	1.94008	
Proportion of variance explained	0.3531	0.3237	0.2916	

Positive factor loadings >.35 are bolded and underlined.

Table 5. Regional Effects on Factor Structure of Media Representations of American Empire, NATO, Latin American, and Middle Eastern Countries

	Rotated Factor Loadings (NATO dummy included)			Rotated Factor Loadings (Latin America dummy included)			Rotated Factor Loadings (Middle East dummy included)		
	Factor 1: Forceful Subjugation of Society	Factor 2: Unilateral Hierarchy	Factor 3: The Illegitimate Use of Force	Factor 1: Forceful Subjugation of Society	Factor 2: Unilateral Hierarchy	Factor 3: The Illegitimate Use of Force	Factor 1: Forceful Subjugation of Society	Factor 2: Unilateral Hierarchy	Factor 3: The Illegitimate Use of Force
Having strength/power/influence	0.1152	<u>0.6342</u>	-0.2266	0.0701	<u>0.6499</u>	-0.2129	0.0997	<u>0.6346</u>	-0.2231
Global scope	-0.1696	<u>0.5454</u>	0.2631	-0.1428	<u>0.5215</u>	0.2857	-0.1555	<u>0.5393</u>	0.2680
Hierarchical subordination	0.2294	<u>0.5556</u>	-0.3711	0.1729	<u>0.5775</u>	-0.3606	0.2118	<u>0.5601</u>	-0.3806
Evoking resistance against	<u>0.4817</u>	-0.0440	0.1978	<u>0.4891</u>	-0.0313	0.1767	<u>0.4852</u>	-0.0400	0.1836
Harboring ambitions/pretensions/aspirations	0.1105	<u>0.4920</u>	0.0004	0.0781	<u>0.5165</u>	0.0394	0.0912	<u>0.4980</u>	0.0177
Violence/aggression	<u>0.5133</u>	0.0524	<u>0.7442</u>	<u>0.5605</u>	0.0462	<u>0.7021</u>	<u>0.5490</u>	0.0516	<u>0.7154</u>
Violation of sovereignty or self-determination	<u>0.8263</u>	0.0926	0.1910	<u>0.8359</u>	0.1287	0.1148	<u>0.8276</u>	0.1051	0.1516
Provocation/adventurism/destabilization	0.2069	0.0590	<u>0.7730</u>	0.2330	0.0462	<u>0.7820</u>	0.2226	0.0643	<u>0.7660</u>
Unilateral action	-0.0433	<u>0.7380</u>	0.2091	-0.0502	<u>0.7186</u>	0.2342	-0.0379	<u>0.7354</u>	0.2027
Military occupation	<u>0.7504</u>	-0.0643	0.2983	<u>0.8637</u>	-0.0679	0.2200	<u>0.7853</u>	-0.0682	0.2588
Human rights violations/absence of democracy	<u>0.4933</u>	0.1764	0.0508	<u>0.4512</u>	0.2086	0.0349	<u>0.4833</u>	0.1838	0.0413
Illegality/violation of law	0.2308	0.0052	<u>0.4048</u>	0.2294	0.0074	<u>0.3930</u>	0.2375	0.0061	<u>0.4077</u>
Imposition of order	0.0835	<u>0.5447</u>	0.2541	0.1074	<u>0.5311</u>	0.2548	0.0958	<u>0.5410</u>	0.2520
Seeking control over resources	0.2963	0.1192	<u>0.4047</u>	0.2920	0.1281	<u>0.3933</u>	0.3076	0.1168	<u>0.4042</u>
NATO country dummy variable	-0.1868	0.0577	0.0433	--	--	--	--	--	--
Latin America country dummy variable	--	--	--	<u>-0.4721</u>	0.0359	-0.3108	--	--	--
Middle East country dummy variable	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.2201	-0.1090	0.2817
Explained variance	2.31930	2.16136	2.01461	2.69218	2.18061	1.98249	2.41890	2.17231	2.00417
Proportion of variance explained	0.3372	0.3142	0.2929	0.3389	0.2745	0.2496	0.3488	0.3132	0.2890

Positive factor loadings >.35 are bolded and underlined.