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American Identity Narratives: A threat to National Security?



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Background, Question, Argument

- Why do America's identity narratives matter for national security? Current American identity narratives matter to the USG because a divided society may lead to a divided military, or worse, a civil-military divide so profound that the military might one day resemble some version of a Praetorian Guard—an element almost as divorced from its citizens as it is from its adversaries. Additionally, the tradition of assigning identities to groups and individuals creates social tensions that degrade the cohesion for a healthy American society from which, the Defense Department will continue to draw its recruits. The ultimate goal of this thesis seeks to inform USG that priority should be given to researching and studying the conflicting American identity narratives which, at the time of this writing, show no sign of self-correction.



Results

- Historic disagreement regarding the distribution of liberty makes the possibility of a cohesive national identity challenging.
- Leaders must make domestic policy decisions that increase inclusiveness within the American system and avoid valuing one identity over another. Attempts to shape the existing conflict in terms of identity is contrary to a cohesive society.
- This research led to two policy recommendations. First, America must encourage separable identities and emphasize citizens as individuals rather than groups. Second, policymakers must promote “cross-cutting ties” since much of the division in America stems from the isolation many experience from one another. Revamped civic education and national service programs can serve as that cross cutting tie.



Research design

- We utilized a qualitative approach to analyze American identity narratives in American history and contemporary society. Additionally we present two historical case studies that highlight the relationship between national identity and state survival.



The “So What”

- A dissolute national identity and an increase of identity based divisions in American society may present a threat to national security.

Next Steps

- How can US adversaries exploit current American identity divisions?
- What is the correlation between the civilian-military divide and current American identity narratives.
- Identify potential and realistic incentives for national service?



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