

Anti-Americanism, Political Cartoons, and a Socio-Geographic Imagination: An Invitation to Further Work

By: Mark Long, Rick Bunch, and Robert E. Lloyd

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Abstract:

This research note synthesizes previous studies to present future directions for the measurement of anti-Americanism within the United States and comparatively. We explain new vectors in our research design and posit new hypotheses for future research. The note highlights the importance of cross-national investigation of anti-Americanism, and suggests some methodological considerations in that endeavor.

Article:

INTRODUCTION

The American Century may have given way to the anti-American century (Datta 2009; Krastev and McPherson 2007; Rubin and Rubin 2004; Sweig 2006). The anti-American dimension to the September 11, 2001, attacks, and the broad international unpopularity of the George W. Bush administration, stemming from the invasion of Iraq in 2003, underlines the need to more fully understand anti-Americanism today. Further, the recent inauguration of the Obama administration provides an opportunity to revisit attitudes to the United States at a moment when America's image abroad is changing. This research note outlines our previous approach to the quantification of anti-Americanism. It maps future research directions that leverage cartoons as a way to measure anti-Americanism for populations worldwide. The results of our previous research underline the power of editorial cartoons to understand attitudes toward the United States. We expect that using more complex tools to measure anti-Americanism, and studying responses to editorial cartoons in different geographic settings, will enable us to capture changing meanings of anti-Americanism through time.

VISUALIZING ANTI-AMERICANISM

This research note synthesizes studies published elsewhere (Long 2007; Long, Bunch, and Lloyd 2009) to present future directions for the measurement of anti-Americanism. We are particularly interested in comparative studies of attitudes toward America. Our initial focus will be on Spain, traditionally a country with relatively high anti-American sentiment (Kohut and Stokes 2006), and on other European states where migrant populations are rising over recent years. There is fascinating research to be done on potential impacts on anti-American sentiment of rising immigration in Europe. Our longer-term research agenda seeks to understand attitudes to

America in countries allied and at odds with the United States. This agenda draws on research underway since 2002 and continuing through to the present.

Our research into anti-Americanism uses quantitative measurement and statistical analyses to measure perceptions of anti-American sentiment on the part of American students. The thrust of our research seeks to understand the complexity of anti-Americanism by having people calibrate the anti-Americanism and fairness of editorial cartoons. Editorial cartoons are purposefully designed to illicit strong emotions and reactions from readers around current and significant events. Their immediacy, partisanship, and charged satire place them among the more extreme forms of expression that society will tolerate. In this sense, editorial cartoons are an appropriate vehicle to track responses to what has been equated with misogyny, racism, or anti-Semitism: anti-Americanism (Hollander 1992).

Previous research showcases anti-Americanism's complexity and underlines how its meaning hinges on the characteristics of both the cartoons and of the people viewing those images (Long, Bunch, and Lloyd 2009). It suggests Americans see cartoons from American newspapers as being less anti-American than cartoons from the premier daily in Europe's most anti-American country, Spain. Americans' perceptions of the treatment meted out to icons of the United States is central to their reading anti-American messages in cartoons. Generally, our expectations were borne out by our experiments. However, one interesting finding that seems to contradict racial responses to the September 2001 attacks was that white U.S. males evaluated anti-American cartoons as more fair than did African American males.

Our interest in comparative research recommends focusing on international dimensions to U.S. politics and policies to ensure sustained attention on the part of editorial cartoonists in the United States and abroad. The September 11, 2001, attacks, ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, or the inauguration of the Democratic administration in 2009, present an ideal laboratory to track responses in the United States and in other polities to the United States, its foreign policy, and the United States as a model for societies worldwide.

Here, we detail our research methodology and signal several interesting results that inform our research design for continued work within the United States and comparatively. We proceed by defining anti-Americanism as following one of three tracks; then by explaining our research design and results from initial data analyses. Finally, we highlight the importance of cross-national investigation of anti-Americanism, and suggest some methodological considerations in that endeavor.

VARIANTS OF ANTI-AMERICANISM

Studies of anti-Americanism usually follow one of three tracks, to wit anti-Americanism as visceral hatred, anti-Americanism driven by contentious (foreign) policy decisions of the United States, and the rejection of the United States as a model for international socioeconomic, political, and cultural change (Long 2007). We found that Americans' reading of editorial cartoons from the United States and Spain suggests an understanding of anti-Americanism on the part of American college students anchored by irrational animosity to the United States. This was evident in students' labeling as very anti-American and very unfair editorial cartoons in which icons for the United States such as, for example, Lady Liberty or Uncle Sam were perceived to

be demeaned in the image. Examples here include cartoons by American McCoy and Spaniard Forges showing Lady Liberty cowering from the attacks on the Twin Towers. Cartoonist El Roto's defaced U.S. flag published in *El País* in 2001 was decried by U.S. students as especially anti-American and glaringly unfair.

MEASURING ANTI-AMERICANISM

Long, Bunch, and Lloyd (2009) developed a research design to investigate how different variants of anti-Americanism resonate with populations in the United States and worldwide. It measures the magnitude of participants' responses to editorial cartoons along twin axes of pro- or anti-American sentiment (that we term message) and fairness (equity) to capture the complexity of anti-Americanism and of participants' responses. Here, we detail results from a first iteration of the study, designed to calibrate Americans' understanding of anti-Americanism, an important lacuna in work on anti-Americanism. That study was guided by several hypotheses: that American participants would read anti-American images as less fair than pro-American images; that participant variables such as gender, race, and political preference would matter when people calibrated the cartoons; and that cartoons variables such as origin, the number of words, whether an icon was present, and whether a foreign policy issue was shown, would also matter in participants' ratings of the images.

To investigate these hypotheses a computer program was designed and administered. After a short training component, 56 student participants viewed 40 cartoons in random order, 20 from the *New York Times* and 20 from *El País*. All images were localized into American English and design elements such as fonts and frames were standardized to minimize subtle cues that might predispose participants to seeing (or not seeing) anti-Americanism in the cartoons. Through the graphic user interface participants first rated the pro- or anti-American messages of each editorial cartoon along a continuous scale, and then rated likewise its equity. Data were gathered and analyzed about editorial cartoons, participants, and their responses.

Visual methodologies focus primarily on one of three "sites"—where the image is produced, the image itself, and where the image is seen. This research is conducted primarily where the image is seen, the site of audiencing. Rose (2001) argues that it may be in the interaction between the image and viewer that images' meanings are ultimately made.

The processes through which we make sense of politics are complex. We use intuitive strategies and are often unaware of precisely how we arrive at decisions about politics (Baldassarri and Schadee 2006; Burdein, Lodge, and Taber 2006). There is ample evidence suggesting that political thinking and decision making is influenced by individual belief systems (Bourne, Healy, and Beer 2003; Domke, McCoy, and Torres 1999; Domke et al. 2003; Johnson 2006).

A viewer's perception of intentions and motivations is closely related to the meaning he or she extracts from cartoons (Brunet, Sarfati, and Decety 2000). How an individual interacts with the contents of a political cartoon should significantly affect how he or she evaluates that cartoon. Brüne and Brüne-Cohrs (2006:437) argue that our ability to infer other persons' mental states and emotions is an evolved psychological capacity most highly developed in humans. They term this the "theory of mind." Our research is designed to capitalize on the theory of mind to calibrate the anti-American sentiment in editorial cartoonists.

Our measuring of anti-Americanism in editorial cartoons underlined its complexity. The research suggests that anti-Americanism is found at the intersection between object and audience, but that there are key image cues that trigger a cartoon being read as anti-American. For Americans, anti-Americanism is about irrational hatred of the United States, evident first and foremost in the artist's treatment of national icons. However, participants in our research recognize equity in some anti-American images, showcasing a readiness on the part of U.S. citizens to think critically about their country. It is the complexity of anti-Americanism and somewhat surprising results such as fair, anti-American cartoons that highlights the need for further research.

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Future research will proceed along a series of tracks. We are interested in learning more about American understandings of anti-Americanism through the use of larger subject pools of U.S. citizens from differing socioeconomic backgrounds and from different demographics.

International comparative iterations of this research, most immediately with Spanish participants, given Spaniards' anti-Americanism and our use of Spanish newspaper editorial cartoons, will be a second important dimension to our work. And, anti-Americanism desperately needs to be better understood beyond the Western world. Longer-term plans include the measurement of anti-Americanism in the Islamic world, for example.

A key strength of our research agenda is the marrying of human and behavioral geographic perspectives. Understanding anti-Americanism is too pressing, however, to be the preserve of any one discipline. Therefore, we hope to be able to enrich the comprehension of the complexity of anti-Americanism by opening our research stream to scholars from disciplines such as psychology and sociology. Likewise, we hope to be able to attract scholars from the geographic settings where we will conduct our experiments to help us tease out the nuances of attitudes toward America there.

Understanding Anti-Americanism at Home

Continuing work with American participants will entail larger samples and participants from beyond the university setting. University students are a useful surrogate for the general population given constraints associated with time, accessibility, and cost. It is important, however, to investigate attitudes to anti-Americanism more broadly, especially among different age groups.

Future research experiments with American participants will also employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative measurement of anti-Americanism will proceed using a research design based on the methodology described here.

Significantly, we are interested in ways in which the discourse of anti-Americanism is both recognized and produced at the site of audiencing. To refine our understanding of American perceptions of anti-Americanism, an important departure here will empower American participants to discuss anti-Americanism with the researchers. Thus, we will embrace qualitative methodologies to interview participants and investigate secondary meanings related to their ratings of message and equity. In short, participants will rate cartoons and then explain their

ratings. Why, in effect, do Americans perceive anti-Americanism primarily through the use and abuse of U.S. icons and why do they evaluate cartoons that disparage icons as so unfair?

Interviews will be video and audio taped and participants' responses will be coded for commonalities and analyzed. Moreover, studying those responses in conjunction with cartoon ratings along our twin axes should provide further insight into the nature of anti-Americanism for Americans. Significantly too, we will use interviews with participants to investigate findings from our research that highlight race as a factor in perceptions of anti-Americanism. This work will also afford us the opportunity to investigate the intersections between biological sex and anti-Americanism. We expect that qualitative methodologies will allow us to hone our understanding of the quantitative relationships between participant variables and seeing anti-Americanism.

Important among the challenges presented by administering such quantitative and qualitative research designs together is the time it will take participants to complete both elements. The quantitative dimension as configured at present requires an average of 27 minutes to complete. Time constraints, then, suggest that we may need to use a random sample from our participants for interview and may also recommend the use of focus groups (Harlow and Dundes 2004). These challenges are magnified when working with participants beyond the university setting. Hence, incentives may be provided to ensure that participants complete both quantitative and qualitative components of our study as per common practice.

Comparative Understandings of Anti-Americanism

A fundamental measure of the success of this research agenda is to understand anti-Americanism as broadly as possible, in terms of its variants, but also to learn how these variants resonate with different populations worldwide. The central importance of American foreign policy decisions in increased manifestations of anti-Americanism, from East Asia to Latin America to Europe is highlighted in the literature (Ikenberry 2005; McPherson 2003; Rubinstein and Smith 1985; Shin 1996; Steinberg 2005). Thus, we anticipate that message ratings will line up more directly with foreign policy cartoons in experiments run outside the United States.

Long-term plans involve a large comparative dataset, but Spanish students will be our first non-U.S. participants. Spain's consistent ranking in Pew studies as critical of the United States makes Spain a logical choice. Although localization of the program and cartoons into peninsular Spanish would mean that the digital experiment could be administered remotely from the United States, interviews and possible focus group dimensions would require research time in Spain. Future research, then, will introduce an important new participant trait in the shape of nationality. We anticipate rich research findings from the comparative dimension, particularly when data is gathered in polities in cultural realms distinct from North America and Europe. The literature provides road maps to places to run the experiment, language challenges notwithstanding for image selection, localization and interview purposes. The continued prosecution of the war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with periodic saber-rattling over Iran and growing tensions with Pakistan, underlines the pressing need to understand attitudes toward the United States in the so-called Muslim world.

There is intriguing research to be conducted here too at the subnational scale in polities such as the United States, Spain, and Great Britain, for example. How different might understandings of anti-Americanism be in cities such as New York, Madrid, or London, all of which have been targeted by radical Muslim extremists, when compared with cities lower on the urban hierarchy in their respective polities? Further still, *within* these cities, how do attitudes toward the United States differ in residential neighborhoods with traditional populations compared with neighborhoods with growing migrant populations?

Future analyses of anti-Americanism in editorial cartoons are enriched by our ability to draw on images from different timeframes as enthusiasm and critique of the United States wax and wane. Thus, in addition to the aftermath of 9/11, we may use editorial cartoons from before and after the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003, for example. Furthermore, subsequent developments in Iraq such as the Abu Ghraib scandal, democratic elections or the surge strategy, or the controversial 2009 re-election of President Karzai in Afghanistan, all present rich opportunities for research. The election of Barak Obama as president of the United States in 2008 was followed closely worldwide and represents another avenue for measuring attitudes to the United States. It may be particularly revealing to contrast our previous work, when data were collected during the administration of G. W. Bush, and attitudes to America under the new Obama administration.

Reacting to Anti-Americanism

Reviewers of our earlier work were interested in how we might give voice to our participants' perspectives on anti-Americanism beyond the confines of our digital experiment. One approach, detailed above, entails the use of interviews and focus groups, where we might tease out responses to these editorial cartoons and allow for a more ranging discussion of attitudes to the United States. This approach presents two fundamental challenges. It signifies more time on the part of participants and researchers, and may require particular effort in comparative work, and it necessarily disaggregates discussion from the sequence of individual images rated by participants. That is not to argue that single cartoons could not be discussed by participants, and the body of cartoons would certainly form an important backdrop to that discussion. However, participants' responses to the each of the individual cartoons in sequence would essentially be confined to the digital environment.

The use of a third axis for participants' responses to the images may provide a compromise solution. This third axis will capture participants' emotional response to the editorial cartoons, in addition to their ratings of cartoon message and equity. Thus, respondents will rate the pro- or anti-American content of individual images and their fairness, as well as their emotional response to each of them. The continuous scale here will run from positive to negative. Analyses of these ratings in conjunction with message and equity will generate a three-dimensional space wherein we can more fully theorize responses to individual cartoons and categories of cartoons and their relationships to participant traits. Thus, we anticipate that the emotional response of older white American males to individual editorial cartoons and to groups of cartoons will differ from those of younger Pakistani females, for example, irrespective of how they rate the images' equity and message. Analyses of such demographics' ratings along all three axes, however, may be particularly revealing.

Throughout we will seek a finer-grained analysis by using self-reported traits that capture gender identity and cognitive style. Our intention is to capture the social and cultural traits of individuals through the use of gender classifications rather than biological sex. Traditionally, biological sex (male and female) has been used as a convenient way to classify participants into groups as main effects in statistical models to compare performances on various tasks. Some researchers argue that this classification approach is too restrictive because it fails to capture the range of social and cultural traits that constitute individual people. Instead, a growing number of researchers have opted to use gender identity as a more meaningful classification for delineating and explaining task performance (Hardwick et al. 2000; Lloyd and Bunch 2008; Saucier, McCreary, and Saxberg 2002).

The Bem sex role inventory measures masculinity, femininity, androgyny, and undifferentiated using masculinity and femininity scales (Bem 1974, 1975, 1977). The questionnaire is a self-reported independent assessment consisting of socially desirable and stereotypical masculine and feminine personality characteristics. It can be seen as a measurement of the extent to which respondents spontaneously sort self-relevant information into distinct masculine and feminine categories. Our expectation is that this refined measure will allow us to better understand previous findings whereby women and men rated both cartoon message and equity differently.

Another potential way of demarcating people's individual traits is cognitive style. Cognitive style can be thought of as the way a person strategizes and solves problems. The work of Simon Baron-Cohen and colleagues has been central to the development of the "empathizing-systemizing" theory of psychological sex differences (Baron-Cohen 2002, 2003; Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright 2004; Baron-Cohen et al. 2003). Empathizing and systemizing are two different dimensions measured by an empathy quotient (EQ) and systemizing quotient (SQ), respectively (Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright 2004). High EQ scores are associated with individuals who show sensitivity to others' emotions. High SQ scores are associated with people who are more analytical by nature. Interaction effects between Bem and cognitive style may shed further light on the importance of participant traits in seeing, evaluating, and reacting to anti-Americanism.

We are intrigued by the potential to unearth some of those intuitive strategies that underpin the processes by which people make sense of politics that this approach may afford. The complex space defined by message, equity, and emotion ratings of the images on the part of progressively larger samples of participants from different demographics in different settings, moreover, may allow us to better understand theory of mind. Interaction effects between equity and emotion may be particularly useful here.

Ultimately, we may choose to give voice to our participants through the use of interviews and focus groups in conjunction with this third-rating axis. A pilot study that considers responses of three groups to a series of images will help us to make decisions about the trade off between interviews and a stand alone, robust digital experiment, each of which has clear advantages. This pilot study will administer and analyze our experiment with one group of participants being interviewed after rating the editorial cartoons along message and equity axes only, a second group being interviewed having rated the editorial cartoons along all three axes (message, equity, and emotion), and a third group being limited to the rating of the images along the three axes.

Finally, we will be interested in exploring the site of production of editorial cartoons. In his research on the popular geopolitics of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, Dodds (1996) interviewed editorial cartoonist Steve Bell and later consulted the artist again in his work on Bell's cartooning of Bosnia (Dodds 1998). In future studies we may investigate anti-Americanism in editorial cartoons through interviews with key practitioners. El Roto and Rall, identified by participants in our work to this point as the authors of particularly anti-American cartoons, represent key interviews in that research.

The centrality of anti-Americanism in the geopolitics of the early twenty-first century makes continued investigation and measurement of what it is and how it works imperative. This research agenda seeks to hone our understanding of anti-Americanism at home and abroad.

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