

Women's Rights Are Human Rights; U.S. Secretaries of State Speech Analysis with NVivo Katherine Henneberger, Class of 2020

In order to examine and contextualize the Trump administration's treatment of human rights, both domestically and abroad, I worked with Nell Fitzgerald '19 (who held a Breckinridge Fellowship) to study the rhetoric of recent U.S. Secretaries of State over time. This project is part of a larger study designed to examine U.S. presidents' human rights policy, and to determine how, when, and if women became a part of that rhetoric. My contribution to this study began with the creation of a database of all speeches and spoken remarks made by the last four Secretaries of State (Rex Tillerson, John Kerry, Hillary Clinton, and Condoleezza Rice) during their first six months in office. Since no such database exists, the first step in this process involved individually copying over 1,800 speeches directly from the U.S. Department of State archives into a plaintext file.

The second part of this project involved the use of NVivo, a text analysis program that would allow me to run queries to examine rhetorical patterns and text frequency within and across the speeches. The speeches were entered into NVivo from the plaintext database and variables such as geographic location, date, and secretary were coded for each speech.

With the database built, analysis could begin. The most common form of analysis in NVivo is to run advanced queries or text searches using the preset attributes (in this case, time period, geographical location, and secretary — for example, Hillary Clinton's 2009 speeches in Russia). Before I began running text queries, I studied influential documents such as the Magna Carta, the 1948 UN Declaration on Human Rights, and the European Union's Gender Acquis, and compiled a thorough list of applicable search terms and phrases. The results of such text frequency searches reveal important phrases and words often mentioned by secretaries, such as "human rights," "women's rights," and "equality." Using these text searches, we can see trends within each secretary's rhetoric.

After running text queries on several different phrases, I ran a comparison across the four secretaries during their first six months in office and looked at their use of the phrases "human rights," "women's rights," "equality," and any variations on those phrases. Most notable is Secretary Rex Tillerson's single use of the phrase "women's rights," used only when responding to a question on the subject. All of these results can be displayed in the form of Word Trees, which map the words leading up to and following each phrase. Using this tool, I was able to examine the context behind each use and map usage patterns across administrations, parties, and gender of the secretary.

As a side project, I also used R software and the Trump Twitter Archive to analyze Donald Trump's use of phrases such as "human rights," "women's rights," "civil rights," "women," and "LGBT." A Twitter scrape revealed a notable absence from the president's personal Twitter account (@realDonaldTrump, which he uses to inform the public on his opinions, decisions, and policy measures), both before and during his time as president, of phrases related to international or domestic human rights. For example, he has only once tweeted about human rights — outside of his presidency, and in the context of mocking Secretary John Kerry's priorities.

This project offered a first look at the data and will continue to shed light on the current administration and its policy, both domestic and international, toward all facets of human rights. Since I only had time to explore a small segment of all Secretary of State speeches, I hope to continue this project by working with Professor Janet Martin to compile a much more comprehensive database using geographical software (ArcGIS) to map global rhetorical trends. Once this database of all U.S. Secretaries of State speeches is compiled in NVivo, and our documentation of the process is complete, this will become a versatile tool for students and professors to use for further research on global issues other than human rights, such as climate change or nonproliferation.

**Faculty Member: Professor Janet Martin
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