

Final Group Project: Strategic Media Narratives

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Intro (*Jack Heym*)

Meetings on the global stage always provide solid opportunities for countries to put out narratives on how they interpreted the meeting went or overall points they want out on the global stage. The COP27 Conference was that of great importance because it saw leaders all across the globe meet to discuss the present and more importantly the future of the global climate. The opportunity for countries to push across strategic narratives could not be more of a slam dunk. This is because the most prominent world leaders have a stage with the global media, other world leaders, and the vast majority of the global public with eyes on the event.

The COP27 Conference is vastly important on the global stage because the issue of climate change is becoming more important year after year. What comes out of this conference to everyone because the environment that we live in affects everybody from every corner of the globe. For example, what the United States says in this conference will hold a lot of weight because of the reputation the US has around the globe and when leaders from America talk countries around the world listen. It is vital to understand what these leaders are specifically saying and understanding the way in which they craft their messages to the public eye. An example, is how American leaders have come under some fire about the climate change crisis and how they have handled it. President of France Emmanuel Macron said bluntly “Americans need to start doing more (Friedman, 2022).” This is an important example of political communication because usually leaders push ideas or narratives but here President Macron is being blunt and straightforward.

The role that media narratives play domestically are important because the big system narratives that countries push are the ones that have buy in by that nation’s citizens already for the most part. These types of international events provide a moment of nationalism within a

country because the nation's citizens can support what their respective country is trying to do. Most importantly media narratives shape the domestic viewpoint of how things are based on how that respective countries leadership wants the public to see things. Overall, the effect of media narratives domestically is vital to the public's view.

Description Of Strategic Narratives *(Robert McCarthy)*

Strategic media narratives are narratives developed through the media by political actors with the goal of influencing certain audiences into having a shared view of past, present, and future politics. This is done in the aim of gaining support behind certain political figures and policy decisions (Grigor and Pantti, 2021). Strategic narratives have been constantly developed within media throughout history, especially in the realm of international politics. Their use is varied, with each country's media creating narratives to support different foreign viewpoints and policy (Grigor and Pantti, 2021).

Larger strategic narratives are constructed through three different forms of narratives. System narratives within the media push for an optimal form of international order that is wished to be achieved. Each country's media will likely push a type of international order that is in line with their values and viewpoint of international affairs (Grigor and Pantti, 2021). Media outlets also push identity narratives, which are used to construct distinct identities of each country or population within international discourse (Grigor and Pantti, 2021). These identity narratives tend to create an "us versus them" understanding of political situations. This takes entire countries and molds them into a generalized single force, almost to be viewed as a single individual. Often this generalized identity is linked to a main leader, such as a president or prime minister. Finally, policy and issue narratives work to create certain understandings of pertinent issues and the policy changes required to combat them. Issue narratives within the media will

attempt to influence the audience's beliefs of what issues are of the highest priority and the most effective way to deal with them (Grigor and Pantti, 2021).

New York Times Analysis (Jack Heym & Robert McCarthy)

The way that both the New York Times and the Global Times report on the climate change meeting will vary to fit the various narratives and messages that each side want to get across to their own people but also globally. Narratives are a huge part of political communication because they are the overarching themes that certain political sides hammer over and over to persuade and influence people that their narrative is the way things really are. When it comes to international affairs, the narratives that mecca countries like the United States and China push are important and are interpreted as such around the globe from Russia to Brazil and everywhere in between. Climate Change is an important issue not only domestically but globally as the future of the global environment hangs in the balance of how things are handled in the present.

Looking at how the NY Times reports on many different issues from politics to sports the way it reports for domestic news to foreign news is drastically different. Looking through the way United States political leaders and the way the NY Times reported on the COP27 conference was trying to push a few main system narratives. System narratives being the broad messages that are pushed out of a nation to the international level. One of the main narratives that was put out repeatedly was that the United States is the sole climate leader across the globe and that they are acting as such. A quote from President Joe Biden from the COP27 conference on how the United States is stepping up to the plate, "the United States is acting... it's the duty and responsibility of global leadership to support developing countries make decisive climate decisions." Reading between the lines just from this quote is important to grasp an

understanding that Biden and the rest of the world think of the United States as a climate leader. President Biden uses the words global leadership very decisively here to put the United States in a conversation the very few countries can enter as being a quote global leader. Overall, this was a main narrative pushed out by the NY Times globally.

With the United States being perceived and portrayed as a global leader in the climate conversation not only amongst the American political leaders but some of the developing countries around the globe it was not the only narrative being pushed. With it being vital to the future of the climate change movement and the potential for a bright future in the climate realm for wealthy nations to help developing nations, that is not the only important criteria for success. The key to a brighter future in the climate discussion is unity in the political landscape.

Another main narrative was how there needs to be a willingness to work together for the betterment of the climate future across the world. It starts with two of the biggest political global powers being the United States and China. Being two of the largest voices in the climate discussion, these two countries being against each other spells trouble for the betterment of resolving the climate change issue at hand. The importance of both sides being cooperative with each other and both leaders being President Biden and President Xi meeting with each other was huge. President Biden was quoted saying “the world expects China and the United States to play key roles in addressing global challenges and for us to be able to work together.” Biden continued by saying “The United States stands ready to do just that work with you (China) if that’s what is desired.” These remarks were monumental steps forward in the climate conversation by showing that two countries that have some animosity towards each other can work together on a humanitarian issue affecting everyone. Furthermore, these were the two

system narratives pushed by the NY Times surrounding the COP27 conference, President Biden and United States political leaders, and global relations surrounding the climate crisis.

The *NYT* articles also work to develop a specific unique identity for the many countries present at COP 27. Each country's identity is developed depending on their overall perceived influence on the climate change deliberations, as well as any relevant political scenarios surrounding them that are of international interest.

At COP27, there was a large focus on the United States and their role in the future of climate change action. President Trump's decision to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Climate Agreement had created uncertainty between other nations who had looked to the U.S. to take a leading role. The *NYT* paints the U.S. as the new "hero" who has returned to help lead the way to a more efficient future. It also paints Biden as a new kind of leader who is prepared to apologize for the mistakes of the previous administration and is investing more into combating climate change than any past U.S. president. Biden boasts of his achievements with the Inflation reduction Act, as well as the laws introduced to regulate further methane production. This identity of the U.S. clashes greatly with other the major industrialized polluters who's leaders failed to appear COP 27, such as China and India. The *NYT* also makes a point to highlight the U.S. as a struggling leader who wants to do more than they are capable of due to political barriers. They show the U.S. as reluctant to agree to the concept of climate reparations due to the fear of unlimited liability to poorer countries. It would be difficult to commit to reparations if funds could not be reliably obtained from Congress. This puts a focus on the political division within the country, as well as continues to push this need for collaboration between every nation to help makeup for different countries' shortcomings. By including the struggles of the U.S, the

NYT possibly attempts to create sympathy and maintain the identity of the U.S. as the international leader of climate change action even when they fall short of their goals.

The *NYT* also creates identity narratives for other countries who have influence at COP 27. Major polluters whose leaders failed to appear are identified as the “bad guys” who have been placing their extreme national interests ahead of international collaboration.. These nations included China, Russia, and India. The *NYT* placed a large focus on China as the greatest disappointment of COP 27. Since China is the largest emitter of planet warming gasses, their lack of collaboration and contributions has made them out to be the largest offender to the lack of comprehensive climate action. Along with this, the majority of European countries at COP 27 have been given the identity of small heroes who have held up their part of the deal, yet have been betrayed by the lack of action by the previously mentioned larger countries. Many of these countries are seen as simply waiting around for the larger emitters to start pulling their weight so climate reparations could be paid and real climate progress can be made. These created identities help to shape an easier believed and followed narrative of characters for *NYT* readers.

Although COP 27 seemed like it would focus on future advancements that could be made to fight climate change, the *NYT* makes it apparent that the main issue of discussion was climate reparations. The implementation of climate reparations is the idea that smaller, poorer nations that have been disproportionately affected by climate based disasters should be reimbursed by the largest emitting countries to pay for damages and other expenses. This policy, mainly pushed by European countries, is not presented as entirely viable for the U.S. Instead the U.S. would prefer to deliver support in forms of monetary pledges that does leave them legally responsible if payments are not able to be fully collected through Congress. Along with this, the *NYT* also

placed great emphasis on the pressures to reform and restructure both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to better fit the modern context of international affairs.

Global Times Analysis (Ethan Bortz)

Every country's action regarding climate change and COP 27 is deemed important and worthy of discussion, because climate change is the main focus of all ten *Global Times* articles. The *Global Times* is extremely harsh when critiquing the actions of Europe and America; the only policy decisions not criticized are those made by China. America's and the EU's "failures" are incessantly repeated throughout the *Global Times* articles. Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands are criticized for returning to coal for generating energy. The *Global Times* claims that these countries are returning to coal because they cannot bear the brunt of the Ukraine-Russia conflict (which is called "US-instigated") and the "worst drought Europe has seen in 500 years." Every country (except the Netherlands) is criticized for not promising to send their leaders to COP27. America receives a wider range of criticism than Europe. According to the *Global Times*, the U.S. is at fault for failing in climate negotiations with China, because of Nancy Pelosi's surprise visit to Taiwan. As well as betraying China's trust, the U.S. is also responsible for constantly undermining China-U.S. climate cooperation. For example, the *Global Times* claims that America used the "so-called 'forced labor' issue as an excuse" to impose sanctions on the Chinese solar industry. America is also criticized for the failure to fulfill its annual funding commitment to assist poorer countries. On the other hand, the *Global Times* presents China as responsible for the most decisions and accomplishments combating climate change. The *Global Times* names some of China's accomplishments as dropping its overall CO2 emissions, installing more wind and solar energy, and hosting the "world's first 'carbon neutral' Winter Olympics."

The *Global Times* builds China's identity as a country that is trustworthy opposed to Western countries, who cannot be trusted to keep promises. America is portrayed as a purely opportunistic country that uses the issue of climate change to "enhance its competitiveness." According to the *Global Times*, the U.S. "only pays attention to climate change when it suits it"; climate change is merely a "partisan struggle" to the U.S. European countries are not portrayed as malicious as the U.S., but as incompetent instead, and unable to deal with the multiple crisis' affecting them. In order to create an us/them distinction, China frequently compares itself to America and the rest of the West. After criticizing the West for half or more of an article, the *Global Times*, starting with "in contrast", will then begin to state all of China's environmental accomplishments. China is portrayed as the only country willing to stick for small, struggling African and Pacific Island nations. The *Global Times* claims that even though African and Pacific island countries are releasing the least CO₂, they are suffering the most due to the actions of Western powers. African country's leaders are frequently quoted as being upset that Western countries are not sending their leaders to COP 27. The *Global Times* states that China is cooperating with African and Pacific Island countries to make COP 27 more favorable for them and China is already planning to support them in other ways.

By criticizing the incompetence, indifference, and inaction of Western countries and identifying China as the only country working to stop climate change, the *Global Times* is positioning China as *the* global leader responsible for worldwide cooperation. *Global Times* portrays the age of global Euro-American soft power domination as coming to an end, with China standing in as the new leader. According to the *Global Times*, climate change is catastrophic and only growing more so, yet Western countries are doing nothing about it. European countries are too inept at dealing with their own energy crisis to care about sending

their leaders to COP 27 and funding struggling nations. America is a grimy opportunist, unable to hold the promise of funding to African countries, and only willing to help with climate change if it means benefitting itself. In contrast, China can do no wrong. China has made and continues to make the most progress out of any country in terms of dealing with climate change. Even though the West does not care about African and Pacific Island countries, China does, and China is willing to vouch for these countries during COP 27. Despite the West's ineptness and even malintent, China wants to cooperate with them. However, if the West wants to cooperate with China, they are going to have to follow China's rules, and that includes no surprise visits to Taiwan.

Comparison (*Ethan Bortz*)

The most obvious contrast between the two news sources has to do with the fact that the *Global Times* is controlled by the Chinese state and the *NYT* is privately owned. While both news sources praise the decisions of their respective country, the *NYT* is able to give a more balanced perspective by criticizing America, while the *Global Times* is unable to critique any of China's decisions. The *Global Times* and *NYT* both blame the other's country for being at fault for the unstable climate, claiming that it is the result of the other country's inaction. Both sources also focus on the importance of providing funds to African countries. The *NYT* frames giving African countries funding as necessary reparations that America owes. The *Global Times* uses the issue of funding African countries to criticize America for not doing so, and bolster China's identity by claiming that China will be the only one helping African countries.

In terms of identity narrative, both the *NYT* and the *Global Times* identify their respective countries as important world leaders who are responsible for solving climate change. The *NYT* identifies China and India as the world's largest polluters. The *Global Times* identifies America

as the world's largest polluter. The *NYT* identifies America's role in combating climate change as a major contributor who is unfortunately hindered by political gridlock. The *Global Times* identifies China as the *only* country working to combat climate change. Both news sources identify European countries as smaller forces in the fight against climate change. The *NYT* takes the perspective of European countries while the *Global Times* writes them off as inept and regressive. The *NYT* places a greater emphasis on the importance of country's leaders in forming a national identity, referring to America as Biden and China as Xi Jinping. The *Global Times* mostly refers to countries as a collective, only referring to country's leaders when discussing their specific policies.

The system narratives presented by the *NYT* and *Global Times* see completely different world orders as desirable. The *NYT* portrays a narrative in which Biden is recouping America from the damage caused by Trump. Biden is setting America back on the right path so that it can continue to be the global leader in combating climate change. The *Global Times'* narrative portrays America as already fallen from its place of global dominance. America and European countries are unable to create a climate sustainable world and should start following China's lead. Both news sources stress the massive importance of global cooperation in COP 27 and in the fight against climate change. The *Global Times* differs from the *NYT* by making clear that in order for global cooperation, countries need to abide by China's rules.

Conclusion (*Robert McCarthy*)

Strategic media narratives have been hugely present within the international political landscape for much of history. Yet, it can be argued that they are more important than ever before due to the continuous influence of social media and ever growing news media landscape. The various media narratives developed around COP 27 is only the most recent example of the power

these narratives have. The *NYT* builds a narrative which prioritizes issues such as climate reparations and lack of international cooperations. They identify the U.S. as a struggling leader, European countries as major contributors, and China as the power needed to make real change. Overall, the *NYT* pushes for international cooperation headlined by a newly returned U.S. The *Global Times's* narrative prioritizes the failures of the Western countries as the major issue. China is identified as the only trustworthy leader in climate change action, with the U.S. and European countries displayed as unreliable. They push for international cooperation led entirely by China. These two extreme examples of strategic media narratives help to teach how media narratives are crafted and implemented within the context of current events.

References

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