

# Flagging the nation: can state symbols promote attachment to the nation in multiethnic societies?

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Although a large literature has examined the effects of exposure to state symbols on political attitudes, voting behavior, and in/outgroup bias, there has been little work examining symbols' effects on nationalist attitudes themselves, with existing studies offering contradictory findings. Leveraging conceptual insights from scholarship on nationalism and ethnic politics, I employ original data from a survey experiment conducted in the US in November 2020 to ask how exposure to state symbols influences individuals' attitudes towards the nation *relative* to other identity categories. I find evidence that exposure to the US flag makes individuals significantly more likely to express pride in being American whilst simultaneously dampening attachment to other identity categories. At the same time, an almost identical effect is found when respondents are asked to reflect upon the meaning of the symbol.

## Introduction:

Every morning across the United States, millions of schoolchildren pledge allegiance to the US flag and to the “indivisible” “nation” that it represents. The creation of a shared national identity among citizens has historically been a pressing challenge for states, aware that “divisibility” is often a function of where one draws national boundaries. This is especially challenging in large, multiethnic polities such as the United States, where *Et pluribus* has often sat uneasily with *unum*.

Indeed, the creation of an American national identity was neither guaranteed nor inevitable. Contemporary consensus among historians is that there was little shared sense of American identity before or even during the War of Independence (Trautsch 2016; Murrin 2018; McNamara and Musgrave 2020). Indeed, Jefferson was not unusual among his contemporaries for thinking of his “country” as Virginia: even once the United States had gained independence (Tarr 2013). Later, when a distinctly American identity emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the boundaries of membership in the political community remained violently contested, with a long and bloody Civil War largely fought over precisely this question. Contestation of American national identity did not end with then: as renowned historian David Blight put it, the Reconstruction period was a tragic “story of how the forces of reconciliation overwhelmed the emancipationist vision” of Constitutional equality for Black Americans long into the 20<sup>th</sup> (and, some would argue, 21<sup>st</sup>) century (Blight 2001, 13). Successive waves of immigration continued to see the boundaries of membership in the American “nation” contested, with both “civic” and “ethnic” understandings of identity remaining to this day (Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990; Huntington 2004).

The focus of this article is the effects of exposure to state symbols on attitudes towards the nation. Leveraging insights from scholarship on nationalism and ethnic politics, I employ original

data from a survey experiment conducted in the US in November 2020 to ask whether exposure to state symbolism makes individuals more likely to express pride in their common American identity *relative* to other identity categories.

Scholars of nationalism and ethnic politics have long coalesced around the notion that national identities are historically contingent and constructed. They have also highlighted the importance of national symbols, myths, and spectacles – often channeled through institutions such as schools and the military - for generating a sense of shared political community (Connor 1993; A. D. Smith 2009; Edelman 1967). Yet whilst we know that they are frequently employed – the pledge of allegiance an example *par excellence* – we know much less about the actual effects of these on nationalist attitudes.

The United States is an important case for exploring these questions. “Extend the sphere,” James Madison wrote in *Federalist 10* in 1787, “and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests” (Hamilton, Madison, and Jay 2008). Madison’s argument – that embracing a diverse representation of interests in a large federation could counter the nefarious effects of faction – would be embraced by proponents and practitioners of federalism across the globe, who were heavily influenced by the American experience (Riker 2012; Stepan, Linz, and Yadav 2011; Kymlicka 1996).

At the same time, the American case also demonstrably shows a more sinister trend towards the very sort of faction Madison warned against, whether seen in increasing levels of identity-based polarization among the public (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019) or the enduring legacy of White supremacy and sectarian violence, captured most starkly in the attacks on the US Capitol in January 2021. Understanding whether state symbols can help foster a sense of shared is therefore a pressing question of contemporary relevance, not only in the US, but also in other multiethnic polities.

This article proceeds as follows. In the following section I show that scholarship has yet to satisfactorily address this question, and that existing studies on state symbols point in opposing directions. In part, this is because scholarship remains wed to a tired “nationalism” versus “patriotism” binary that obscures much of the important *relational* character of identity. In the next section I argue that research from nationalism and ethnic politics can help to move research in a more productive direction. I then introduce the survey design and hypotheses, before discussing the results. I finish by summarizing the findings and presenting areas for further research.

## Literature review:

Scholars in political psychology have examined the effects of exposure to state symbols on a variety of outcomes, with existing findings pointing in opposing directions.<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand, exposure to flags has been shown to drive negative outgroup prejudice. In the US case there have already been studies highlighting how exposure to flags can amplify partisan divides (Chan 2017), with the US flag exerting consistent pro-Republican effects (Huddy and Khatib 2007; Kalmoe and Gross 2016; Carter, Ferguson, and Hassin 2011). In particular, these effects are strongest for racially prejudiced respondents, suggesting that racial hostility among Whites towards Black candidates is amplified through exposure to flags (Kalmoe and Gross 2016; Ehrlinger et al. 2011). Similar effects can be found outside the US context: in Germany, for instance, exposure to the German flag increased outgroup hostility amongst highly nationalistic respondents (Becker et al. 2012). This hostility extends to negative evaluations of the outgroup symbol itself: one study found that those who identify more strongly as British, Irish, and Northern Irish displayed stronger negative reactions to outgroup flags (Muldoon, Trew, and Devine 2020). Perceptions of threat have also been shown to exert a blanket effect on negative outgroup bias: one study, in which respondents were asked about their reaction to a hypothetical burning of the French flag, found that negative outgroup bias increased irrespective of which group was presented as being responsible for the burning (Marinthe et al. 2020).

On the other hand, however, research has also demonstrated positive effects of flag exposure across a wide range of outcomes, whether deciding or not to engage in tax evasion (Chan 2019), the purchasing of locally-manufactured goods (Wang and Zuo 2017), and willingness to help one's neighbors (Guéguen, Martin, and Stefan 2017). Furthermore, flag exposure can promote notions of egalitarianism: in a rare cross-country study, Becker and her colleagues find that despite differing values associated with each of the 11 country flags studied, the more nationalistic and patriotic the respondents, the more they associated their flag with egalitarianism and positive emotions (Becker et al. 2017; Butz, Plant, and Doerr 2007; Kolstø 2006). One study found that exposure to the Israeli flag promoted political moderation through significantly reducing outgroup hostility among nationalists, even taking into account the fact that the flag slightly *increased* outgroup hostility among non-nationalists (Hassin et al. 2007).

One way to reconcile these findings is that exposure to flags increases the entitativity of the group – in other words, leading to reification of the group as a “category of practice” (Brubaker 2004), leading to both increased positive emotions and egalitarian attitudes towards the perceived

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this research grew out of social identity theory, a research paradigm inspired by Tajfel (1982) and his collaborators. Social identity theory posits that individuals have an in-built drive to seek group membership and to categorize themselves as part of one or more groups, facilitating positive in-group and negative out-group attitudes. Researchers have sought to test the extent to which state symbols may activate or amplify such attitudes.

ingroup, yet at the same time lead to increased outgroup hostility through a process of differentiation (Callahan and Ledgerwood 2016; Brewer 1991).

In this case, however, it is crucial to consider how the boundaries of these groups come to be drawn, made salient, and maintained. One limitation with existing scholarship is that the conceptual tools used to do this remain limited to a distinction between “patriotism” (love of country) and “nationalism” (superiority over others): a distinction which not only is analytically ambiguous, but which also is out of step with the cutting edge of nationalism scholarship.

The distinction between “patriotism” as a positive force, on the one hand, and “nationalism” on the other, reflects an underlying normative concern with nationalism as a rigid, authoritarian ideology (Adorno et al. 1950) and one that manifested itself in distinctions between “good” civic nationalism founded on human rights and personal freedoms, and “bad” ethnic nationalism (Kohn 1944; Tamir 2019). Kosterman and Feshbach, for example, use a widely-adopted measurement strategy derived from questions on political attitudes, in which nationalism is understood as “national superiority...downward comparisons of other nations” whilst patriotism is as “love for and pride in one’s nation – in essence, the degree of attachment to the nation” (Kosterman and Feshbach 1989, 271; Becker et al. 2017; Wright and Citrin 2011; Kimmelmeier and Winter 2008). In some cases this is a composite measure taken from several questions, whereas in other cases these are derived from a single question: Wright and Citrin, for example, ask respondents “How proud are you to be an American?” to measure national pride, whereas agreement for the statement “America is a better country than most other countries” is used to measure nationalism, understood as synonymous with “chauvinism” (Wright and Citrin 2011, 339). As Bonikowski argues, not only is it not clear whether the difference is one of degree or of kind, but the equation of nationalism with chauvinism itself obscures other serious normative problems relevant for assessing the impact of symbols, such as exclusionary visions of the national community (Bonikowski 2016, 430).<sup>2</sup>

## Theory:

This is also a distinction which lags behind the cutting edge of research in nationalism and ethnic politics. Given that state and group boundaries have seldom been congruous (Gellner 1983, 1), scholars have problematized not *nationalism* - as was the case previously - but rather the

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<sup>2</sup> Consider the following two examples. In the first, a member of a majority ethnic group possesses a highly exclusionary vision of the national community – one that coincides with the boundaries of the ethnic group itself - whilst a member of a minority ethnic group possesses a highly inclusionary vision of the national community that encompasses the entire population of the polity. Both respondents could be equally “patriotic” yet have in mind completely different understandings of the “nation” in hand: one highly exclusionary and potentially even oppressive, one inclusive. In the second example, the committed ethno-nationalist strongly believes in his/her group’s right to dominate the politics of the multiethnic polity, but has few pretenses about the group’s superiority vis-à-vis foreign states. In this case, the individual would not only be more “patriotic” than “nationalistic,” but this itself would be interpreted as being normatively positive.

understanding of the nation as a fixed political community. Consensus is on the side of the so-called “modernists,” who posit that nations are historically contingent and socially constructed communities (Mylonas and Tudor 2021). These implications grew out of, and further spurred scholarship that sought to identify the causes and types of nation-building policies, ranging from social communication (Deutsch 1961) and state-citizen relationships (Wimmer 2018) to formal institutions (Weber 1976), technological change (Anderson 2006), mass schooling (Darden and Grzymala-Busse 2006; Darden and Mylonas 2016), foreign policy (Mylonas 2012), or non-material factors such as “constitutive stories” (R. M. Smith 2003) or “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012).

Constructivist theorizing led scholars to further consider how national identities are relationally defined (Wimmer 2013; Abdelal et al. 2009), with multiple, overlapping, and often conflicting identity categories held by individuals, such as ethnicity, race, religion, and caste (Chandra 2012; Horowitz 1985; Posner 2005). This possible tension between multiple identity categories emerged as an important locus of inquiry for scholars wishing to understand how states could generate a sense of political community amidst potential conflicting loyalties. On the one hand, scholars endorsed federalism and power-sharing based as solutions to divided states (Horowitz 1985; Lijphart 1969; Stepan, Linz, and Yadav 2011; Kymlicka 1996). On the other hand, it is not clear to what extent these policies can generate a shared sense of belonging: attachment to the state is not only consistently lower among non-core groups, but, as the authors of a multi-country study concluded, “federalism appears to encourage *both* an alternative identity to the state and pride in the state [emphasis mine]” (Elkins and Sides 2007, 704), supporting other findings that suggest that institutional changes may lead to new cleavages forming (Posner 2005) or may empower would-be separatists (Hechter 2000). At the same time, non-core groups can – albeit with considerable difficulty – alter national narratives when in a position of considerable political power in a way as to detract from inclusive identification with the state more broadly (Aktürk 2012). More commonly, though, the threat of state collapse in multiethnic polities arises from the presence of a “core ethnic region” whose members may develop a loyalty to an imagined core-group nation-state rather than the union itself (Hale 2004a).

In recent years, researchers have directed increasing attention at how individuals contest and consume nation-building policies aimed precisely at this generation of state-wide loyalty. Billig problematized what he perceived as a Western fixation on contentious or “hot” manifestations of nationalist politics elsewhere, focusing attention on the effects of more “banal” quotidian reminders of the nation at home, such as national flags “hanging limply in public places” (Billig 1995, 38). Billig’s pathbreaking work spurred a research direction that sought to uncover the ways in which the nation is “flagged” and reproduced in daily life (Knott 2015; Goode 2020; Antonsich 2016; Hearn and Antonsich 2018). An important methodological insight from this literature is that top-

down policies and practices, from quantitatively recording identity in censuses to creating symbolic spectacles legitimating the state, may be contested by citizens' everyday practices and behaviors (Wedeen 2015; Bochsler et al. 2021).

## Research design and hypotheses:

Understood as such, we can begin to rethink the effects of exposure to national symbols in multiethnic polities such as the United States. As reminders of a supra-national community whose boundaries are essentially contested, and which comprise a plurality of sub-state identity categories, one possible explanation for differing findings among existing studies is that state symbols activate competing conceptions of the political community: at times inclusive, and at other times exclusive. Indeed, research has shown that priming respondents to think about broader, more inclusive identities – the common ingroup identity model – can dampen hostility to outgroups by recategorizing them as members of a common ingroup (Wright and Citrin 2011; Transue 2007; Gaertner et al. 1993)

Existing research has shown that American national identity is multifaceted, with many members endorsing a mixture of both inclusionary and exclusionary definitions of identity (Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990). At the same time, members of all ethnic groups display high levels of patriotism, even when taking into account the fact that non-Whites tend to display higher levels of ethnic pride than do Whites, who do not tend to think as much in ethnic terms (Citrin and Sears 2009, 173). Thus whilst the authors conclude that there is no clear tension between respondents' ethnic and national identities, they nonetheless express concern that elevating “the politics of difference by legitimizing the allocation of benefits on ethnic lines” may “foster the kind of identity choice that chips away at the solidarity of the national political community”(Citrin and Sears 2009, 174).

**The key question, then, is not whether exposure to symbols drives “patriotism” or “nationalism,” but – consistent with the insights from nationalism and ethnic politics scholarship - rather whether it drives individuals to accentuate their membership in the common political community over sub-unit identity categories such as race/ethnicity, religion, region, or state.**

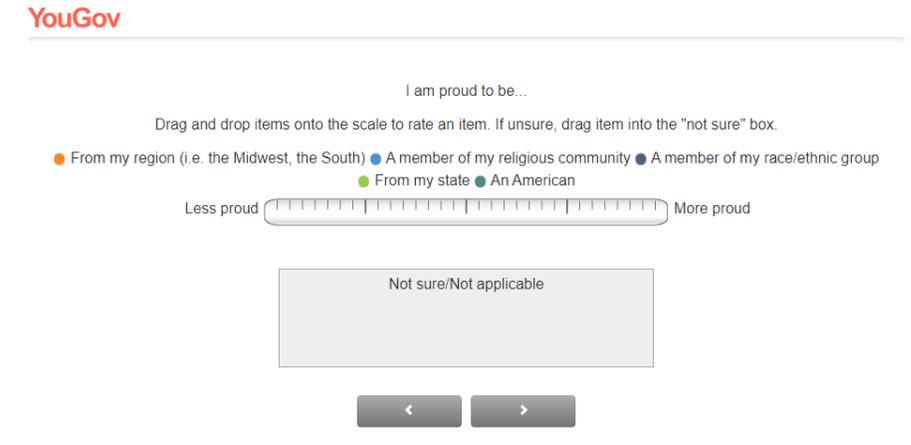
To answer this, I conducted a survey experiment as part of GW's team module for the Cooperative Congressional Election Study, which was fielded between September 29, 2020 - November 03, 2020 and has a representative sample of 1000 respondents, conducted by YouGov.<sup>3</sup>

Respondents were divided into eight groups. All groups answered the same prompt: “I am proud to be,” and were asked to drag and drop items onto the placement widget (shown in Figure 1), which was scaled from 0 to 100. One group (the control group) only received this question. The remaining groups were given treatments prior to answering this question.

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<sup>3</sup> IRB approval was granted in August 2020.

Figure 1. Survey question as seen by respondents.



The seven treatment groups were given different primes, each designed to elicit and isolate the effects of a particular type of symbolic exposure. The first treatment displays a US flag for 2 seconds before respondents answer the question on pride. The second treatment displays the flag, but prior to moving to the question on pride asks respondents to write what the symbol means to them. This should help to distinguish any differing effects between respondents merely being shown the flag – the “banal” nationalism of a hanging flag - and respondents actively reflecting upon the meaning of the symbol. A third treatment replaces this reflection task with a short message designed to be explicitly inclusive: “Diversity strengthens our shared American identity.” A fourth treatment combines the flag, the message, and the reflection task. The remaining treatments enable effects from any combination of primes to be assessed.

Table 1. Wording of the randomly assigned primes in the experiment (prior to question on pride)

<i>Randomly assigned primes (preambles to question on pride)</i>	<i>N</i>
<b>Control.</b> [No prime]	71
<b>Flag placebo.</b> Respondent is shown flag image below for 2 seconds. 	56
<b>Flag + reflection task.</b> Respondent is shown flag image below for 2 seconds. After 2 seconds, the flag image is replaced with the following question and a text box: <i>What does the American flag mean to you? Please limit your answer to around one sentence.</i> 	64

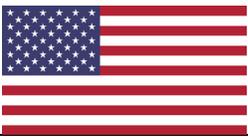
<p><b>Flag + narrative.</b> Respondent is shown flag image and the text below for 2 seconds:   <i>Diversity strengthens our shared American identity.</i></p>	64
<p><b>Flag + narrative + reflection task.</b> Respondent is shown flag image and the text below for 2 seconds:   <i>Diversity strengthens our shared American identity.</i>                  After 2 seconds, the flag and text is replaced with the following question and a text box:  <i>What does the American flag mean to you? Please limit your answer to around one sentence.</i></p>	70
<p><b>Reflection task.</b> Respondent is shown text below and given a short text box in which to answer.  <i>What does the American flag mean to you? Please limit your answer to around one sentence.</i></p>	62
<p><b>Narrative + reflection task.</b> Respondent is shown the text below for 2 seconds:  <i>Diversity strengthens our shared American identity.</i>                  After 2 seconds, the text is replaced with the following question and a text box:  <i>What does the American flag mean to you? Please limit your answer to around one sentence.</i></p>	75
<p><b>Narrative.</b> Respondent is shown the text below for 2 seconds.  <i>Diversity strengthens our shared American identity.</i></p>	73

Table 2 displays the summary results from the question on pride. Consistent with existing studies, pride in being American was consistently high, with over 94% of respondents providing an answer, whereas respondents' values in other identity categories were both lower on average, more varied, and with more non-responses.

Table 2. "I am proud to be..."

	Mean (%)	Std. Dev.	% responses
An American	73.71215	28.15971	94.04
A member of my race/ethnic group	58.34766	31.32975	88.44
From my region (i.e. the Midwest, the South)	57.46168	28.9436	89.63
From my state	59.32336	30.45815	91.90
A member of my religious community	57.33832	34.11705	76.28
<i>N</i>	535		

*Observations with one or more "don't know" or "skipped" were dropped, as were those where levels of pride in all identity categories were within 5 points of one another (out of a maximum of 100).*

This alone, however, does not tell us anything about whether the primes led respondents to display higher levels of pride in the superordinate group *relative* to other identity categories. In order to capture this, I created a new dependent variable – *supranational* - coded 1 if a respondent indicated greater pride in being American than in all other identity categories, and coded 0 if a respondent

indicated greater pride in any other identity category. From this discussion we can outline three hypotheses.

*H<sub>1</sub> Flag treatments should exert a positive effect on respondents' level of pride in being American versus other identity categories as a "banal" reminder of the superordinate national community.*

The first hypothesis is that the flag treatments should exert a positive effect on respondents' levels of pride in being American versus other identity categories. That is, the state symbol reminds individuals of their membership in a superordinate American political community (Billig 1995; Gaertner et al. 1993; Transue 2007; Wright and Citrin 2011). Because this study specifically examines the *relative* weight of expressed pride in identity categories and requires that the superordinate group take precedence, this not only sets a higher bar than, say, asking respondents *only* to rank pride in their American identity, but it also is more likely to capture the underlying concept in question.

*H<sub>2</sub> Overall, existing partisan and/or ethnic/racial divides should not reliably predict supranationalism*

To ensure that what is truly being captured by these treatments is a superordinate, supranational American identity, existing partisan and/or ethnic/racial divides should not reliably predict supranationalism. In line with work showing the salience of ethnic identity for non-White Americans (Citrin and Sears 2009) and the increasing salience of racial resentment among White Americans – particularly in light of the 2016 presidential election (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019) - it is reasonable to expect that supranationalism might be filtered through ethnicity/race and partisanship. Yet if this is the case, the less confident we can be that the identity being captured is truly superordinate and not reflective of an exclusive or partisan view of the groups.

*H<sub>3</sub> Reflection and narrative treatments should exert stronger and more polarized responses than flag treatments.*

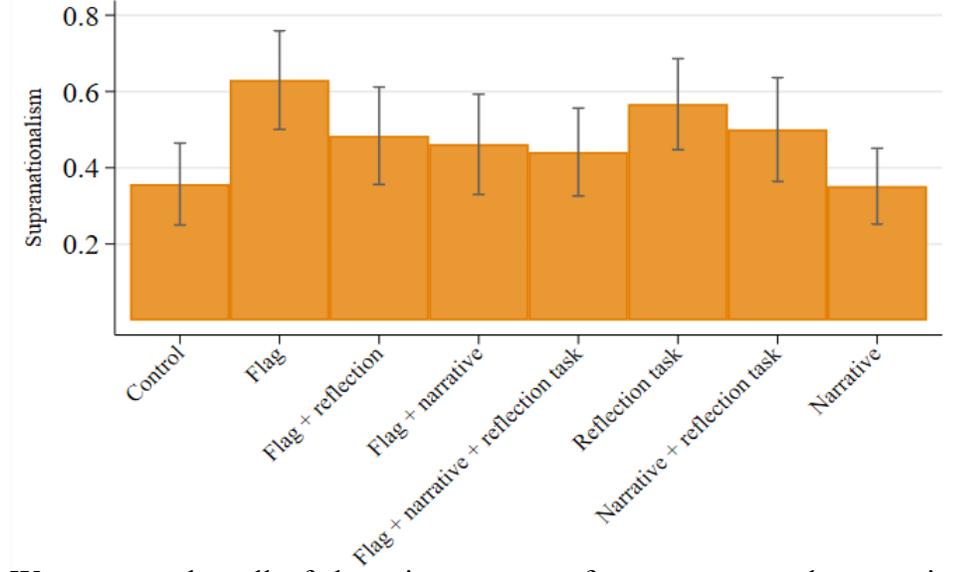
Finally, given that the boundaries of national identities are constantly being renegotiated and contested, the invocation of a particular vision of the superordinate political community – such as in the narrative prime “Diversity strengthens our shared American identity” – should exert partisan effects, for instance, on strong Trump supporters/opponents. At the same time, we might expect that reflecting upon the meaning of a symbol as opposed to being exposed to the symbol in a more “banal” setting may reinforce or otherwise activate more deep-rooted ethical narratives or “stories of peoplehood” (Billig 1995; R. M. Smith 2003), group norms, or relational comparisons with relevant outgroups (Abdelal et al. 2009).

## Results:

Figure 2 below shows the main results from OLS regression analysis. The bar heights capture the average level of supranationalism per treatment group, whilst the vertical lines show the 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2.

Effect of symbolic primes on pride in American identity versus other identity categories (OLS, 95% CI)



We can see that all of the primes (except for exposure to the narrative) drive an increase in supranationalism compared to the control. Exposure to the flag and reflection upon the meaning of the flag exert the largest influence, and are both substantively and statistically significant: almost one in every four people exposed to the flag will then rank their pride in being American *above all other* identity categories. This effect meant that the proportion of respondents prioritizing their American identity shot up to a clear majority – over 60% of respondents - when compared to the control alone, providing strong evidence in support of Hypothesis 1.

Table 3. Average marginal effect of primes on supranationalism (OLS binary DV)

	(1) Individual primes	(2) Clustered primes	(3) Interactions
Flag	0.24** (0.09)		
Flag + reflection task	0.10 (0.09)		
Flag + narrative	0.10 (0.09)		
Flag + narrative + reflection task	0.09 (0.08)		
Flag primes		0.12* (0.05)	0.17** (0.06)
Reflection task	0.18*		

	(0.09)		
Narrative + reflection task	0.13		
	(0.09)		
Reflection primes		0.12*	0.19*
		(0.06)	(0.08)
Flag*reflection primes			-0.16
			(0.11)
Narrative	-0.01		
	(0.08)		
Narrative primes		-0.08	-.02
		(0.05)	(0.11)
Flag*narrative primes			-.02
			(0.11)
Reflection*narrative primes			--
			--
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_cons	0.37**	0.39**	0.36**
	(0.06)	(0.036)	(0.04)
<i>N</i>	537	537	537
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.024	0.013	0.0196
<i>Prob&gt;F</i>	0.076	0.065	0.0620
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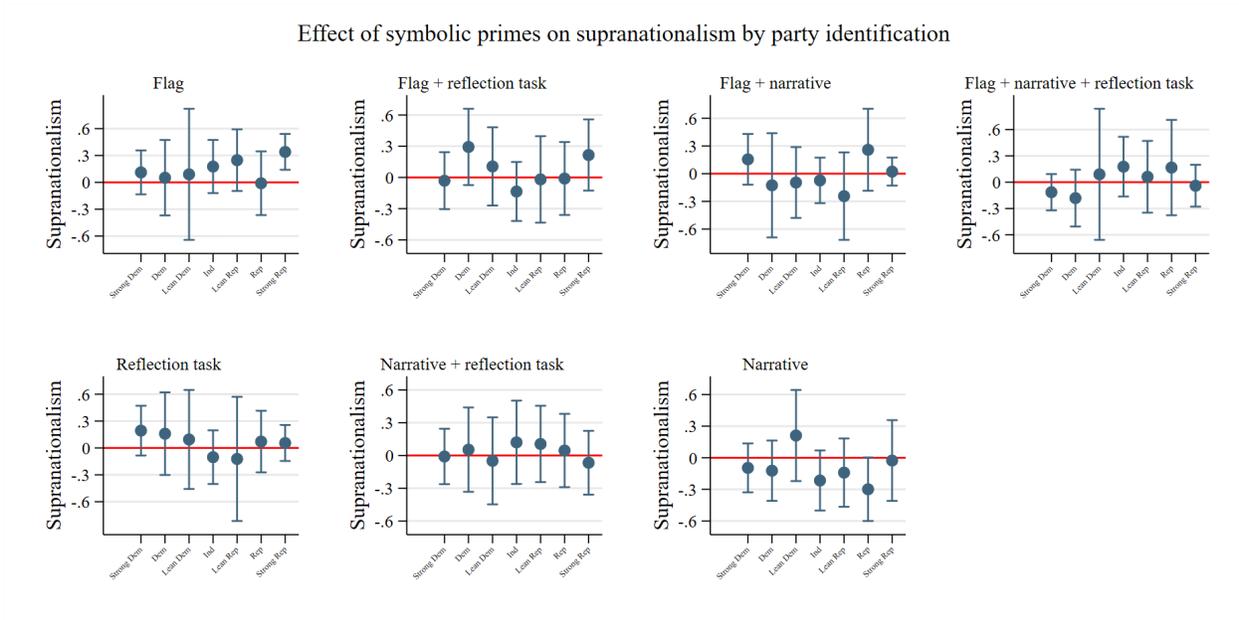
Standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 3 further shows that the effects from the flag and reflection tasks are consistent across all treatments, as shown in column 2, which clusters treatments according to type: flag, reflection, or narrative. In other words, not only is there a significant and consistent effect when exposed to the flag alone or reflecting upon the flag, but that these effects – albeit less sizeable – hold when other elements are added to the treatment.

Whilst this provides strong evidence in favor of Hypothesis 1, we must still ask whether this is indeed capturing a broader sense of common group identity. After all, respondents could be prioritizing their American identity not because it represents a superordinate and inclusive group, but because the “American” identity they are prioritizing leans upon particular definition (Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990). Thus, are respondents proud of being “American” because this represents a particular “regime of ethnicity” (Aktürk 2012) : monoethnic, multiethnic, or antiethnic?

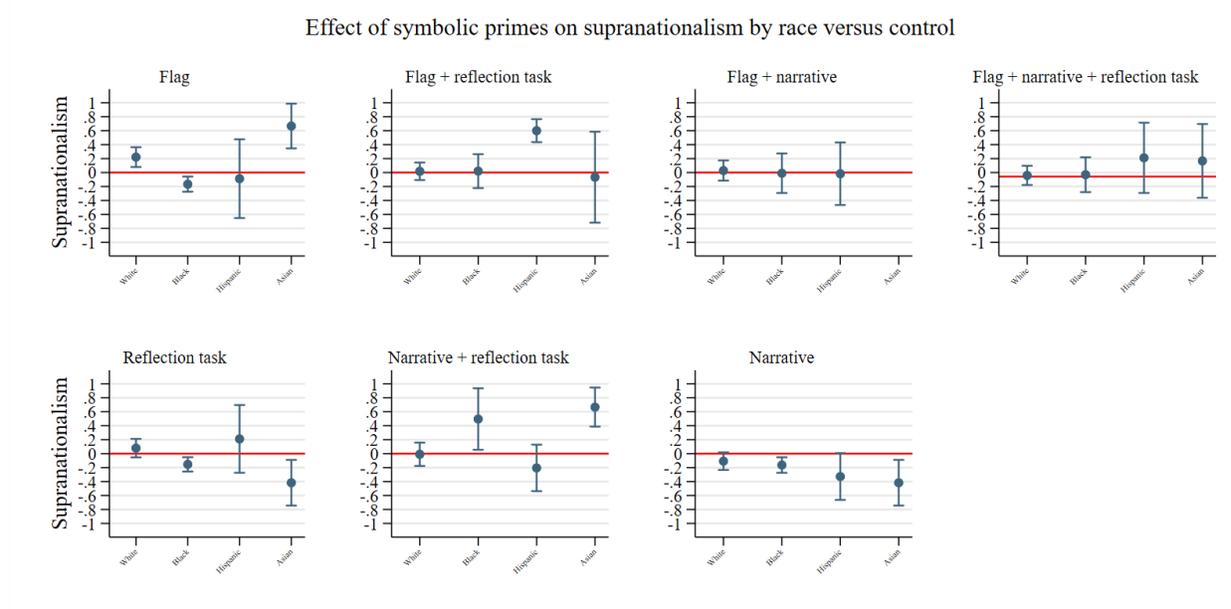
One way to do this is to examine the heterogeneous effects, drilling down to see whether variation in respondents’ priors is driving the above results.

Figure 3:



As can be seen in Figure 3 above, no significant party effects seem to be present, except for the positive effect of the flag prime on strong Republicans. As I argue later, this is likely in part explained by strong affective polarization occurring during the Trump presidency.

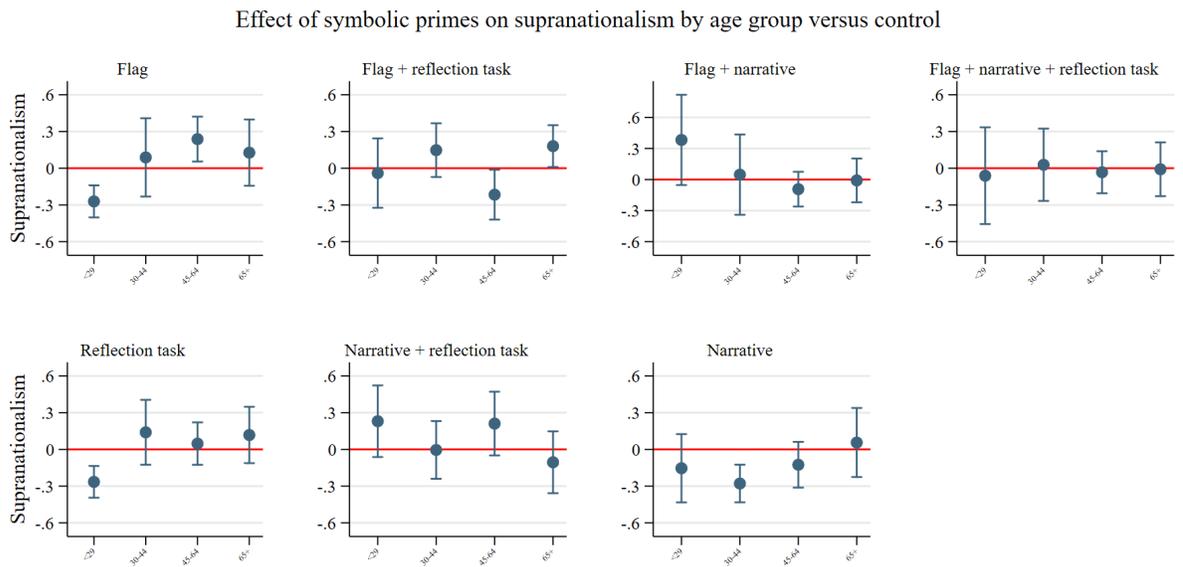
Figure 4



Results are more interesting when we examine race in Figure 4. The narrative prime exerted a consistently negative effect across racial groups. The narrative and reflection primes individually dampened supranationalism among Black respondents, but this effect is inverted when both primes

were combined. The flag prime also exerted a strong, significant effect for Asian respondents whilst the reflection task had an equally strong yet opposite effect, although the sample size (N=18) for Asian respondents in the survey is incredibly small.

Figure 5



Examining age, too, we can see that the flag and reflection task primes – which, on average, elicit strong positive evaluations of American identity versus other identity categories – consistently predict negative evaluations of American pride among younger respondents, which are both significant and closely clustered together, pointing to a roughly uniform effect. Whilst not directly impacting this study, it nonetheless corroborates with findings elsewhere that have identified strong generational shifts on the political spectrum among Americans (Abramowitz 2018).

Accordingly, then, whilst there is some interesting variation among respondents' priors, importantly these instances do not appear to be driving the results as displayed in Figure 2 and Table 3. Nevertheless, this alone does not allow us to reject the null for Hypothesis 2: that existing partisan and/or ethnic/racial divides predict supranationalism. To better identify if this is the case, I ran several OLS regressions to test the predictive power of existing partisan and identity-based variables on supranationalism. Table 4 presents only those variables which have a statistically significant effect in one or more of the regression models. To repeat: if supranationalism is simply capturing partisan and sectarian divides, then these variables should exert strong predictive effects.

Table 4: Regression model results

	(1) Supranational ism binary DV	(2) American pride	(3) Ethnicity /race pride	(4) Region pride	(5) State pride	(6) Religiou s pride
Party ID: Republican	-0.05	-7.44*	-5.12	-5.79	-12.72**	-5.99
Party ID: independent	-0.01	-5.07	0.26	-2.02	-7.05	-1.32
Party ID: other	-0.03	-13.36*	-14.27*	-9.44	-12.80	-5.79
Higher education	-0.10*	-5.69*	-8.16**	-1.92	-8.69**	-1.53
Born-again Christian	0.11*	1.76	4.56	0.63	-1.67	-2.27
Black	-0.15	4.04	25.43**	-5.63	-5.84	5.33
Age: 30-44	-0.08	9.43*	0.41	-1.57	2.39	6.39
Age: 45-64	-0.12*	13.59**	9.85*	-0.51	2.60	-1.10
Age: 65+	0.03	17.41**	8.89	0.28	3.99	3.98
Religion: somewhat important	0.00	-2.75	-3.25	-1.50	-0.73	-25.49**
Religion: not too important	-0.01	-10.83**	-7.85	-7.28	-5.35	-37.52**
Religion: not at all important	0.03	-12.51**	-13.90**	-12.41**	-12.34**	-61.28**
Religion: skipped	-0.37	-53.17*	32.70	-16.55	-12.72	-21.65
Immigrant background	-0.01	1.05	1.98	-3.42	-6.24*	2.62
Oppose Dreamer citizenship	-0.01	-5.59*	-2.00	-6.65	-9.55**	-5.97*
Oppose ban of chokeholds by police	0.10*	4.83	1.42	-2.66	3.68	-2.46
Disagree re: presence of systemic racism	-0.13**	6.78**	9.12**	4.48*	1.10	2.90
Trump: somewhat approve	-0.12*	-5.01	0.06	0.43	4.09	-5.67
Trump: somewhat disapprove	-0.21*	-8.24	-10.70	-1.77	-1.58	-11.37*
Trump: strongly disapprove	-0.34**	-18.89**	-7.25	-7.21	-6.57	-13.02**
_cons	0.70**	80.71**	44.19**	70.88**	94.64**	105.74**
<i>N</i>	690	535	535	535	535	535

Interestingly, few of these variables exert a consistent effect on supranationalism, as shown in the first column. Ethnicity and race have no significant effects. Other factors, such as increased education, for instance, are unsurprising, with a relatively small substantive effect: it would take ten students to continue education beyond high school for just one to newly prioritize the superordinate political community.

Responses to two identity-related questions appear to have important implications for supranationalism. The first, the respondent's views on banning chokeholds by police forces across the US, was selected as a proxy for support of the George Floyd protests and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement more broadly. The results show that opponents of chokehold bans are more likely to express supranationalism. Whilst the size of the effect is relatively modest, in substantive terms

it provides evidence against Hypothesis 2, suggesting that supranationalism may also be capturing a more exclusive vision of the political community predicated on an often racialized discourse of “law and order”(Beckett and Francis 2020).

The second identity-related question, however, supports Hypothesis 2. Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statement that “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.” This question is commonly used in ANES surveys to capture racial resentment (Abramowitz 2018). Yet the wording of the question is also amenable to thinking about the notion of *systemic racism*, with those who disagreed with the statement in effect denying the existence of systemic racism. These respondents were also significantly *less* likely to express supranationalism, and conversely more likely to express pride in being American and their ethnic/racial group.

In other words, this shows the utility of examining *relative* levels of pride in order to identify issues for which inclusive and exclusive visions of the political community are in clear tension. As can be seen for both of these questions, the effects are either inversed or lose statistical significance when assessing their impact on levels of expressed pride in other identity categories. As discussed in the previous section, one shortcoming of existing reliance on the “nationalism” versus “patriotism” dichotomy is that respondents could favor any one of these visions for the political community – ranging from segregationist to assimilationist or accommodating – whilst being coded as any combination of “nationalist,” “patriot,” both (or neither!). The evidence here suggests not only that this is a false dichotomy, but that examining *relative* levels of pride is an important strategy to avoid potentially serious flaws in interpretation.

However, there is also some strong evidence supporting the null hypothesis – that existing partisan and/or ethnic divides *do* reliably predict supranationalism – regarding attitudes towards Trump. Approval of Trump strongly predicts supranationalism, with stronger disapproval predicting stronger rejection of supranationalism. Surely, then, what is being captured is not supranationalism, but rather an embrace of “Make America Great Again” White identity politics?

This is likely a part of the story. However, it also reflects an ongoing process of contestation over what American identity means. In this case, the Trump presidency can be understood as having aggressively promoted a particular identity proposal that starkly polarized citizens.<sup>4</sup>

Effects on other identity categories support this view. For one thing, attitudes towards Trump strongly dampen pride in other identity categories: strong opponents of Trump express significantly less pride in their identities as Americans (by 19 percentage points), as well as in their religion (by 13 percentage points). Indeed, there is a progressive decline in pride towards all identity categories as one becomes more critical of Trump. In other words, respondents may be rejecting or

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<sup>4</sup> Scholars in comparative politics have shown similar processes of identity proposal contestation. See Hintz 2018; Aktürk 2012.

embracing the specific identity proposal associated with the Trump presidency, thus accounting for the strong predictive power of attitudes towards Trump on supranationalism. This is consistent with research showing the increased importance of affective polarization among the American public (Levendusky 2017; Iyengar et al. 2019).

There is some evidence for this interpretation when examining respondents' reflections upon the meaning of the American flag. As shown in Table 5, reflections upon the meaning of the US flag are heavily skewed according to one's stance towards Trump: of his strong supporters, over 90% voiced an unambiguously positive interpretation of the meaning of the flag; of his opponents, less than half did.

Table 5: US flag evaluations by support for Trump

	Strongly support Trump	Strongly oppose Trump
Positive evaluation	91.14%	48%
Neutral/mixed evaluation	8.86%	44.8%
Negative evaluation	0%	7.2%

This is reflected in the content of the responses as well. A consistent theme among the reflections was that the flag had multiple meanings. Opponents of Trump consistently offered a mixed interpretation of the flag. One standard type of response was to de-emphasize the meaning of the symbol. Some respondents stressed that “it really has no particular meaning other than being a material symbol of the country,” that the flag is “just a symbol, that I’m unattached to,” “just a piece of cloth,” or that “people of all countries put too much importance on flags.” An equally common type of response was, however, to instead emphasize what the flag *should* represent, juxtaposing this with perceived actual conditions. For example, the flag “sometimes elicits pride and sometimes great shame,” evokes “a sense of pride but has it’s [sic] faults,” representing “both the high-minded ideals as well as our failures and sins,” and a “symbol of my homeland that is sometimes twisted to represent ugly divisive views.” A few respondents offered a more explicitly partisan reflection, describing the flag as a “symbol of Americans for all Americans, not just the Trump yahoos who think they are so-called patriots,” a “symbol of the potential for freedom...coopted by the right,” an “idol that our country blindly worships...it harkens to Nazi-like nationalism,” and a symbol that has “become conflated with hatred, bigotry, and nationalism lately.” Only a minority of respondents viewed the symbol in an unambiguous negative light, for example, “the racist flag of a murderous colonial-settler state,” “a country founded on false pretenses,” “oppression of minorities,” and simply: “imperialism.”

Responses among strong supporters of Trump were noticeably different in tone. Here, too, a few responses juxtaposed what the flag means to them with the political situation in the country.

Accordingly, the flag represents “an honorable nation...currently under attack by leftists,” “FREEDOM and democracy...not socialism!” and “equality not communism.” One respondent retorted that “you wouldn’t understand [the meaning of the flag] since you [YouGov] are a socialist organization.” More frequently, however, are unambiguously positive statements. Some focus on America being “greatest country in the world,” the “greatest nation to have ever existed,” “our country and the force for good that it is,” describing the flag as a “symbol of our democracy and freedom.” Others emphasize the role of the military, with the flag representing “freedom...as a result of men and women dying,” “all the people who have sacrificed their lives so we can be free,” the “sacrifice paid by the military,” and “pride in my country and those who served.” Rhetorically, the focus is more on *stating* what the flag means rather than offering an interpretation of what, normatively, it *should* mean, which supports the interpretation that affective polarization is occurring with regard to the meaning of the flag.

The results for Hypothesis 3 were more mixed. On the one hand, the narrative primes had no consistent effects, and were only marginally different from the control treatment. On the other hand – and of more interest - the effects from *viewing* the symbol versus *reflecting* upon its meaning were almost identical. This is curious: after all, for Billig, “the routine business of flagging, is not a conscious activity; it differs from the collective remembering of commemoration” (Billig 1995, 41). In other words, simply being exposed to the flag should exert a weaker influence than actively thinking about the flag – yet the results show that this is not the case.

One interpretation is that individuals were engaging in a process of “attribute substitution” (Kahneman 2003; Kahneman and Frederick 2002). That is, when faced with a complex judgement – in this case, the “meaning of the flag” – respondents intuitively substituted a more easily accessible heuristic attribute: in this case a particular identity narrative. As Hale argues, ethnic myths “can be shown to have properties as rules of thumb that help account for the special force often attributed to ethnic categorizations in group identity and intergroup relations” (Hale 2004b, 476).

Despite the different types of narratives among Trump supporters and opponents, several clear commonalities also show that reflecting upon the meaning of the flag leads respondents to access broadly similar “narratives of peoplehood.” Whilst some are clearly more partisan and exclusive than others, there is importantly little indication that respondents are talking about fundamentally different political “peoples.” Reflecting on the meaning of the US flag generally elicits similar “persuasive historical stories that prompt people to embrace the valorized identities, play the stirring roles, and have the fulfilling experiences that political leaders strive to evoke for them,” (R. M. Smith 2003, 45). Around 40% of responses tap into “ethically constitutive stories” of peoplehood: stories that “present membership in a particular community as somehow intrinsic to who a person is,” rather than “political power” or “economic” stories alone, which tend to focus

more narrowly on prescribed political and/or economic benefits of membership in the political community (R. M. Smith 2003, 98).

The findings here suggest, therefore, that whilst Billig is correct to point to a difference between unconscious, everyday “flagging” and conscious reflection, in practice individuals may be strongly predicated towards the former even when prompted to “reflect” on the meaning of the symbol. Respondents satisfied in ways which end up resembling the “routine business of flagging,” accessing a more easily available heuristic (Billig 1995, 41; Kahneman 2003; Kahneman and Frederick 2002).

## Summary and Discussion:

This article studies the effects of exposure to national symbols on nationalist attitudes. Drawing upon social identity theory and the common ingroup identity model, as well as insights from literatures on ethnic politics and nationalism, I ask whether exposure to national symbols can drive individuals to accentuate their membership in a common political community *relative to* other possible group loyalties. This is an important question for thinking about politics in culturally diverse polities, where not only are there multiple, overlapping – and possibly conflicting – loyalties held by citizens, but also where putting “patriotism” against “nationalism” is analytically and ethically flawed.

I find that exposure to the US flag and reflecting upon its meaning both lead to sharp and statistically significant increases in supranationalism – findings which hold when other elements were added to these primes (Hypothesis 1). Importantly, these results were not driven by existing partisan and/or identity-based priors (Hypothesis 2), and these factors have little predictive power for supranationalism itself, suggesting that the concept is tapping into a sense of common identity rather than simply reflecting existing divides.

Support for Trump, however, did emerge as a strong predictor of supranationalism. I argued that this was driven largely by affective polarization: a finding which is consistent with other work in American politics, and which was also borne out when examining respondents’ reflections on what the US flag meant to them. It also points to an important dynamic of contestation regarding identity proposals, with Trump representing the “capture” of the state by a highly polarizing vision of the political community.

Additionally, I found that contrary to expectations, reflecting upon the flag and being exposed to the flag both exerted a strong upward effect on respondents’ sense of pride in their American identities relative to other group identities (Hypothesis 3). I argued that this is because respondents engage in a process of “attribute substitution”; that is, they use available heuristics – in this case, narratives of peoplehood - to evaluate the meaning of the symbol.

Future research might further interrogate the differences between exposure to a symbol (or narrative) and reflection thereupon: the findings in this paper point to a potential process of attribute substitution, but this merits further investigation. Experimental studies of the effects of eliciting constitutive stories of peoplehood on political outcomes might also be a fruitful way to build upon a growing literature on constitutive stories (Mylonas and Tudor 2021). Furthermore, research might analyze the ways in which the identity of incumbents can “activate” coalescing or competing stories among respondents.

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## Appendix i: Flag reflection statements (alphabetical order)

13 colonies and 50 states democracy upheld and freedom	Americans have the right to live in a free country and to live their lives as they see fit.	Freedom
A country I'm proud to call home	An honorable nation, I strongly support, currently under attack by leftists.	freedom
a goal we hope to reach, one nation out of many with fully equal rights for all	As a symbol of our democracy and union, it should be a reminder of all we can accomplish together. Out of many, one.	freedom
A joining of states to make a United state that is hinged on democracy and freedom	As a symbol, I think it is great	freedom
A national symbol of pride and patriotism, with all of the history that comes with it of all who fought and died for the freedoms we all enjoy	Colorful piece of decorative cloth	Freedom
A piece of cloth who's symbol supposed to represent truth, justice and the American way.	Dare to be stupid	Freedom
A sense of pride but has its faults	Democracy and unity	Freedom and blood shed
A symbol of our freedom	Democracy, equality and freedom of speech.	Freedom and democracy.
A symbol for a country.	Democracy, freedom, fairness, the constitution.	freedom and entitlement
A symbol of a government and people	Fair rule of law.	Freedom and equal opportunities for everyone
A symbol of a safe place to live.	During the Trump presidency, it means isolation, racism, oppression and failure.	freedom and honor for our country
A symbol of freedom and democracy	Equality, equal opportunity, and liberty for all.	Freedom and it represents the greatest county on Earth.
A symbol of my country, very important.	Everything	Freedom and justice for all
A symbol of Nationalism, which is generally harmful or inconsequential	Everything	Freedom and liberty
A symbol of our country and its achievements.	Everything it represents America.	freedom and liberty and proud to be one
A symbol of our country.	everything!	Freedom and opportunity
A symbol of our freedom	Everything. It stands for freedom.	freedom and pride
A symbol of our nation that sometimes elicits pride and sometimes great shame.	Everything...I love America!	Freedom and Prosperity
a symbol of out country	Flags are symbols, so it represents our country and our democracy; unfortunately, it's become conflated with hatred, bigotry, and nationalism lately.	Freedom and prosperity
A symbol of patriotism	Fought for Her for 26 years	freedom and security
A symbol of personal freedom for the rest of the world to see.	freedom	Freedom and self expression
A symbol of the most generous, fair and highest opportunity for success and free liberty.	Freedom	freedom and the ability to achieve whatever we want without fear of retaliation from the government or other people.
A symbol of the USA	freedom	Freedom and the sacrifices it takes to keep it
A symbol representing our country. Despite those who are perpetual whiners, and find a false fame by being the loudest... What our country does, has done, and will likely continue to do for ALL its people, and the ALL countries should be well remembered.	Freedom	Freedom and unity
A symbol saying USA instead of the words/letters.	Freedom	Freedom but we dont have it
A symbol that's misinterpreted to the level of ridiculousness.	Freedom	Freedom given to AMERICANS by Americans who fought for it
A symbol to be respected.	Freedom	freedom greatness a good way of life
A symbol to identify the USA. Countries need to have them for some reason.	Freedom	Freedom liberty
A symbolic representation of our country in flag form, nothing more.	Freedom	Freedom of religion and pursuit of happiness.
-a touch point to immediately remind us of the core foundations of this company when founded and present today	Freedom	Equality not communism
A United States for the people by the people.	Freedom	Freedom of speech
A veteran who served to protect the flag.	Freedom	FREEDOM OF SPEECH
America	Freedom	Freedom of WE THE PEOPLE
America is a free country. We have earned those stars and stripes, as a country.	FREEDOM	freedom rights
America, freedom	Freedom	freedom to believe what you want and practice your religion
american flag	Freedom	Freedom to follow your dreams if you're a white male. the rest have to work harder at it and overcome the unfair issues created.
Americans fought for our freedoms	Freedom	Freedom to live how I fell fit.
		Freedom!
		Freedom!!
		Freedom, equal rights, hope and opportunity
		Freedom, from radicals, terrorist, any enemy/s foreign and demestic, who jeopardize that freedom
		Freedom, hope, love, trust, the land of the brave
		Freedom, liberty, and independence.
		Freedom, Liberty, Constitutional rights.
		Freedom, Liberty, Justice,
		Freedom, opportunity, security
		Freedom, security, patriotism
		Freedom, which I am willing to fight for.
		Freedom.

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Freedom..the right to believe and be individuals  
frem for the people  
glossing over the bad things in our history.  
God country and freedom  
God family friends flag  
God, freedom, liberty  
Greatest symbol of our nation  
Hard-fought for freedom  
heritage, loyalty. freedom.  
home pride democracy  
Home, honor, security.  
Honestly it's just a piece of cloth to me.  
Honestly, right now (and really always for me  
since my teens) it's been a nice design people lift  
up to the point of frank idolatry; it's the people  
of a nation that are important.  
Honor, Pride, History.  
How long our country has been around  
I always associate the flag with the military.  
I am not sure what it means to me right now, but  
I used to think it meant unity and equality of its  
citizens.  
I don't know  
I don't know  
I served in the u.s. Marine Corp..do the math  
i suppose freedom  
I think it is about how this country was founded.  
I USSE TO THINK I KNEW WHAT IT  
MEANT BUT NOW AFTER SEEING THEM  
HANGING UPSIDE DOWN I JUST DO NOT  
KNOW.  
Imperialism  
Independence for the American people  
Independence, freedom from tyranny and  
people rule the government.  
Is a symbol to represent the country  
It doesn't mean anything to me  
It doesn't mean much to me personally.  
it has come to stand as a symbol of white  
nationalists  
It identifies my country.  
It is a representation of our nation  
It is a sign of who we are, our freedom, our  
country  
It is a source of pride  
It is a symbol of a society that respects and  
adheres to our Constitution.  
It is a symbol of Freedom  
It is a symbol of freedom and unification.  
It is a symbol of our country and freedoms.  
It is a symbol of our country as it should be - 50  
states united, and not divided.  
It is a symbol of our country but is not sacred  
It is a symbol of our history and progress  
through the years and of our Freedom.  
It is a symbol of our nation and values like  
freedom  
It is a symbol of struggle and lives given to  
secure our freedom.  
It is a symbol of the greatest nation to have ever  
existed.  
It is a symbol of the United States.  
It is an icon of our country.

it is great  
It is just a symbol  
It is just a symbol, that I'm unattached to.  
It is nothing but a symbol.  
It is representation of the nation  
It is something that should be hung on days like  
veterans day, memorial day and other important  
holidays such as that. Not something to be worn  
or blow your nose on.  
It is symbol of the nation  
It is the official flag of the USA. It is just a flag.  
It is the racist flag of a murderous colonial-  
settler state. It means terrorism.  
It is the symbol of our country  
It is the symbol of our country.  
It is the symbol of our democracy and freedom.  
It is sacred and anybody who trashes or destroys  
it should be in prison.  
It is used to make people feel a certain way.  
It is what all Americans can and should unite  
around.  
It mean everything  
It means a country in which I can live free to  
express my ideas and feel like I am safe from  
anarchy.  
it means a symbol of hope, freedom and justice  
It means being proud of my country. It means  
freedom. It means life, liberty and the pursuit of  
happiness. It means democracy.  
It means equality, fairness, unity for each other  
and our country.  
It means everything in my life.  
It means everything.  
It means freedom  
It means freedom and democracy for  
Americans.  
It means freedom and liberty. A lot of blood has  
been spilled for our rights.  
It means freedom to me.  
It means freedom, freedom to make your own  
choices  
It means freedom, liberty, and justice for all.  
It means I am able to live freely.  
It means I'm apart of a United nation  
It means joy strength and ability  
it means nothing to me because I do not worship  
or care about a flag when people are hungry and  
dying in this country  
It means safety and security for all U.S.  
Citizens.  
It means that I live in a free country where we  
have the army to protect us and we get to vote  
for the people who are running the country  
It means this is a united nation.. or should be.  
It means to be free and to have the chance to full  
fill your dreams.  
It means to me that we have freedom.  
It means to take pride in the liberties that we  
have in this country even if you disagree with  
them.  
it really has no particular meaning other than  
being a material symbol of the country

It represents all Americans, and we should do  
good by, and all respect each other  
It represents our history and as well as our  
current state.  
It represents the country  
It represents the freedom purchased for us by  
the blood of patriots.  
It represents the people who fought to come  
here and then became a loyal part of the  
American experience.  
It should be a symbol of freedom and survival.  
But the country is so bad, the symbolism is weak  
now.  
It shows the unity and diversity that has made is  
a great nation  
It stands for freedom, equality and sacrifice for  
the Judeo-Christian values this country was  
founded on.  
It stands for our FREEDOM and  
democracy...not socialism!  
It symbolizes the freedom and ideals of our  
nation.  
It symbolizes the United States  
It used to mean a proud nation or to be an  
American before trump, now with Biden there's  
hope again  
It's a flag, and that's it.  
It's a national identifier, no more, no less.  
It's a piece of fabric that means America when  
we compete with other countries or like, out  
around the world.  
It's a sign of freedom.  
It's a symbol of freedom and democracy around  
the world.  
It's a symbol of liberty and freedom/  
It's a symbol of my country  
It's a symbol of our country  
it's a symbol of our country but not something  
that is personally all that meaningful for me  
It's a symbol of our Country.  
It's a symbol of our country.  
It's a symbol of the country.  
It's a symbol of the potential for freedom of all  
who reside within our borders, no matter how  
they got here or what they do here.  
Unfortunately it's been coopted by the right to  
represent a much more limited view of how they  
define "freedom".  
It's a symbol of the United States  
It's a symbol that represents pride in our  
country.  
It's a symbol. Nothing more. People of all  
countries put too much importance on flags  
It's an idol that our country blindly worships and  
sees as more important than actually taking care  
of our people. I think it's weird that Americans  
are so obsessed with the flag - it harkens to  
Nazi-type nationalism.  
It's an object with stars that represent the 50  
states of the union with stripes representing the  
original 13 colonies  
its just a flag its the people behind the flag the  
concerns me

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It's just a flag of the United States, it doesn't have any meaning to me.  
Its Represent Honor and justice For all But From ABOVE in The Heavens We Bow Our heads In Humility Before the King Of Grace And Mercy From Where our help Comes and the Laws ,\* Our Heavenly Father" he made The Nations! We Just Salute In them We have been Very Mid directed over Many Generations Its time to Come Home To Where Glory Lives,,,, Heaven!  
It's representative of our nation both our high minded ideals as well as our failures and sins.  
It's stands for free and reflects our long difficult journey to get where we are today.  
its the flag with which we identify our country of origin weather its a person, ship building, vehicles or unit.  
It's the symbol of our country.  
It's the symbol of the USA, and as such it represents everything this nation has done, both good and bad  
It's the symbol representing all the people who have sacrificed their lives so we can be free.  
just a flag  
Just a symbol  
Just the independence  
land of free home of the brave. best country to live in  
Land of the free and home of the brave. Free markets and individual liberty.  
Liberty  
liberty  
Liberty and Freedom in our Republic.  
liberty and justice for all  
Liberty, freedom  
liberty,pride,democracy  
Life liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all Americans  
Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness at the expense of lots of military.  
Lives lost fights faught all in the name of freedom  
love it  
Loyalty to country  
Many brave soldiers died to secure and preserve the freedoms we enjoy.  
Means freedom from England and Slavery means nothing  
My brother died defending this country and I would do the same  
My freedom  
Not a whole lot, just a symbol of America.  
Not applicable  
Not much  
not much  
Not much.  
Not very much.  
nothing  
nothing  
Nothing  
Nothing  
nothing

nothing it is just a flag.  
Nothing its just a flag  
One nation under god indivisible with equality for all. That means equal opportunity in all that encompasses ones life and needs..health welfare, education. Job opportunities,  
One united 50 state of many diverse peoples.  
Oppression of minorities  
Our Flag represents to me the ideals that are in our Constitution and Bill of Rights.  
Our freedom  
Our freedom and the lives of those who have died for it.  
Our journey to where our nation has been and currently is.  
Part of the nation  
Patriotic National Pride  
patriotic pride  
Patriotism  
patriotism and respect for those that fought for out FREEDOM  
Peace and justice for all.  
pretend patriotism, i.e. people who love America but hate Americans  
Pride  
Pride & honor for those that have given their lives for colors' of our flag.  
Pride in my country  
Pride in my country and those who served. Land of the free. The great republic.  
pride, courage, freedom.  
pride, honor, freedom  
Pride, one nation under God.  
Proud American  
Proud to be an American  
Proud to be an American citizen with freedom  
Racism, greed, a country founded upon false pretenses  
Rebellion against tyranny and the struggle to maintain freedom  
Recognition of our history  
Reminds me that all blessings, liberties and freedoms are given by God alone and the Constitutional restraint is on the government, not the people.  
Representation of America/USA...once was the most powerful country/world or global leader on many platforms, etc...Now, at the present, it is at its lowest/most embarrassing/poorest/disappointing/shameful/ etc.  
Representation of the 50 states  
Represents common ideals, national heritage, liberty, pursuit of happiness, justice for all.  
Represents the 50 States and the freedom of the people here in America  
represents the ideals that we should uphold and honors those that have given their life for our freedom  
Sacrifice paid by the military  
Stands for liberty and freedom

Symbol of Americans for all Americans, not just the trump yahoos who think they are so called patriots  
Symbol of federation.  
Symbol of freedom  
symbol of freedom and dreams  
Symbol of freedom and pride  
Symbol of freedom and the sacrifices made by previous generations to secure that freedom.  
Symbol of freedom and unity  
Symbol of my homeland that is sometimes twisted to represent ugly divisive views.  
Symbol of our country  
symbol of our country and the force for good that it is.  
Symbol of our Nation, which I love.  
Symbol of the greatest nation on earth  
Symbolizes USA  
that all people should be free and unite together that I live in America but I am not really free  
That men and women died that we could be free!!  
That our forefathers fought for our freedom and to have a great country, but instead there are certain ones in this land that are dragging it down.  
That the American ideal still stands  
That we are a union of states, each with their own government, and united by a federal government with limited power over the states.  
The 50 stars for the US states and red, white & blue colors for USA.  
The American flag has more negative than positive connotation to me because patriotism in recent years seems to have taken on the tinge of nationalism.  
The American flag has no special meaning to me.  
The American flag is a symbol of overcoming adversity  
The American flag is a symbol of the greatest country in the world. It is a symbol of all the men and women who have died in the fight to keep our freedom; the freedom to live, work, thrive, worship, in the greatest country in the world.  
The American flag means freedom because of the military protecting our freedom  
The American flag means freedom for all that live in America.  
The American flag represents the 50 states.  
The American flag represents the most evolved system of governance man has devised, a system of principles and limited government.  
The American flag represents the unification of the United States of America  
The American Flag stands for freedom which was given to this country as a result of men and women dying to keep this county free to live, work and dream without a dictatorship  
The American flag symbolizes an imperfect but preferable democracy.  
the best country in the world

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The blood spilled by patriotic people for freedom

The Divided States of America and the 4th of You Lie!

The false promise of justice and liberty used by an imperial power to legitimize its hegemony.

The flag is a strong symbol which represents democracy within the United States and its territories.

The flag is a symbol of American history and values.

The flag is a symbol of the country, including the natural, inalienable rights afforded to every American, and a recognized beacon to the world of the freedoms with which our country was founded in and guaranteed to all today.

The flag is a symbol of the United States of America.

The flag means unity means we are one means peace

The flag represent our freedom fought for by our people-it should never be disgraced or damaged.

The founders of our country and what they did to make this country a better place to live.

The greatest country in the world.

The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave the national anthem & we are free because of veterans

The people who fought a died to give us freedom

The pride of our country, democracy, hope, and the never ending pursuit to creating a more perfect union. Hope.

The representation of all the States

The symbol of our country, of democracy, of a people who duly elect a president not beholden to a monarchy.

The symbol of our country.

The symbol of the US.

The troops that died for our rights the united states

Thirteen stripes representing the original states, 50 stars for each state, all united.

This flag represents the greatest country in the world! My grandfather, father and myself fought to protect what it represents!

This represents America

To me, it symbolizes our freedom. Fought for and protected by so many selfless heroes in the military, and even those who've never enlisted but support and defend the American dream and values. Sorry for the extra sentence.

True Freedom, and remembering the men and women who served and died for our flag!

United people under God indivisible with freedom and justice for all!

Unity

Unity

Unity

Unity, freedom

Unity, opportunity, respect and integrity.

Use to mean america the beautiful then all the foreigners came and took books out of libraries and prayer and the pledge of allegiance out of schools it use to mean building a country now its barely staying open and this is what we show kids today that it isn't what it use to be

Used to be pride and the best

Values and ideals that we have a responsibility to live up to.

very good

War, aggression and inequality.

We stand

You wouldn't understand since you are a socialist organization