Chapter 4
Exploring Public Perceptions of Native-Born American Emigration Abroad and Renunciation of American Citizenship through Social Media

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ABSTRACT

There has been little work done on American emigration abroad and even less done on the formal renunciation of American citizenship. This chapter provides an overview of both phenomena in the research literature and then provides some methods for using the extraction of social media data and their visualization as a way of tapping into the public mindsets about these social phenomena. The software tools used include the following: Network Overview, Discovery and Exploration for Excel (NodeXL Basic), NVivo, and Maltego Carbon; the social media platforms used include the following: Wikipedia, YouTube, Twitter, and Flickr.

INTRODUCTION

Renunciation is the most unequivocal way in which a person can manifest an intention to relinquish U.S. citizenship. -- U.S. Department of State

The vast majority of people in the world are a member of a country; for many, their national identity is an integral part of their sense of self and their lifestyles. Being an American is an important part of life for the 320 million citizens of the U.S. However, there are still annual cases of native-born U.S. citizens...
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who choose to irrevocably renounce their citizenship for a variety of reasons. This chapter explores the relatively uncommon phenomena of American expatriations and the rare extreme cases of citizenship renunciations; based on the idea of nationality as in-part based on the human imagination, this work will include research into social media to capture a sense of the public discourse around this topic. (The social media approaches will include sampling from an open- and crowd-sourced encyclopedia; a massive collection of videos on a video content sharing site; a microblogging site, and a digital image and video sharing site. The types of data extractions will include the following: article networks on Wikipedia; video networks on YouTube; #hashtagged conversations on Twitter; keyword searches on Twitter; user networks on Twitter, and related tags networks on Flickr.)

To gain a sense of the size of this issue, it may help to acquire a sense of the numbers. The world population (at the time of this writing) is 7.3 billion people. There are currently 320 million Americans. Of this population, 35% of hold an American passport. At any one time in the world, there are 7.6 million Americans living abroad; this expatriate community “would constitute the 13th largest U.S. state by population size” (Stcherbatcheff, June 28, 2014). (Another source suggests that at any one time there are 3-6 million Americans abroad in 160 different countries (excluding the military, which is apparently counted differently) (“American diaspora,” Jan. 17, 2015). (Note: An “expatriate” or “expat” is a person who lives outside his or her native country.)

The “expat” community are comprised of those who are exploring the world, serving their country, living abroad with foreign spouses; those working at various organizations abroad; those stretching retirement dollars by living in countries with lower costs of living; and others. Many are military personnel (who are not often counted as expats even if they live abroad). These are, in the migration literature, the mobile ones as compared to the broadly immobile others. In 2014, there were about 3,500 Americans who renounced their citizenship to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). [According to Section 6039G of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, IRC section, the IRS of the U.S. Treasury has to release a quarterly publication of the individuals who’ve chosen to expatriate. One example may be viewed here, for the quarter ending March 31, 2014, for example: Quarterly Publication of Individuals Who Have Chosen to Expatriate (https://s3.amazonaws.com/public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2014-10139.pdf).]

The citizens of the U.S. and those long-term residents with green cards who choose to renounce their citizenship and permanently emigrate from the U.S. are a small minority. In 2014, according to records from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) of the U.S. Treasury, there were 3,415 former Americans who went through this irreversible process (“Quarterly Publication of Individuals, Who Have Chosen to Expatriate, as Required by Section 6039G,” IRS; A record 3,415 Americans..., Feb. 12, 2015). The prior quarterly public dataset is created when exit tax forms are filed with the IRS; these numbers do not include “consular expatriations,” and it is unclear if that data is available through the U.S. State Department. With those caveats about the undercounting, that is 3,415 out of 320,090,857 Americans on Jan. 1, 2015, according to the U.S. Census (“Census Bureau projects U.S. and World Populations on New Year’s Day,” Dec. 29, 2014). The named number of American emigrants is 1/100,000th (.000010658%) of the population. While these numbers are quite small, a visual of the statistics collected by the deVere Group, a financial advisory firm serving many American expatriates, suggests that there may be an upward trend (Picchi, Feb. 12, 2015), at least in the near-term. The 3,415 is a small subset even of the total 7.6 million Americans who live outside the U.S. (Picchi, Feb. 12, 2015); that would be 4/10,000