

# Spinning the Globe? U.S. Public Diplomacy and Foreign Public Opinion

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*Global public opinion has emerged as a prominent issue in international relations. But have U.S. public diplomacy efforts during the post-9/11 period successfully improved foreign publics' appraisals of U.S. foreign policy? We examine this question by estimating the effects of U.S. high-level visits to foreign countries on public opinion in those countries. We base our theoretical arguments on the political communication literature, but extend them to consider transnational dynamics in international relations. Specifically, we argue that U.S. leaders' credibility in the eyes of foreign publics is critical in shaping attitudes toward U.S. foreign policy. Empirically, we show that the effects of such visits were initially significantly large and positive, but weakened once the war in Iraq began and international media started reporting negative aspects of the "war on terror." Most interestingly, we find some evidence that high-level visits eventually exhibited a backlash effect.*

Global public opinion has emerged as a prominent issue in international relations. The U.S. leadership appears to increasingly make efforts to communicate directly with foreign audiences through public speeches and appearances, as well as through other informational and citizen-exchange programs. While some observers place high hopes in these "public diplomacy" efforts (e.g., Nye 2004), others are skeptical (e.g., Rubin 2002). Does public diplomacy matter? More specifically, have U.S. public diplomacy efforts during the post-9/11 period successfully improved foreign publics' appraisals of U.S. foreign policy? Although it seems the importance of these questions is growing, the effects, if any, of public diplomacy on foreign public opinion have rarely been the object of empirical scrutiny in the academic literature.<sup>1</sup> There is also a pessimistic (or perhaps convenient) view in the U.S. government that the effects of public diplomacy are difficult, if not impossible, to measure (United States Government Accountability Office 2004).

In this paper, we attempt to gauge the effects of a specific and high-profile form of U.S. public diplomacy—high-level visits—on public opinion around the world. When top U.S. leaders make official

visits to foreign countries, the traditional "substantive" business of diplomacy goes on behind closed doors. But modern diplomacy certainly has a public face and purpose as well. By using cross-national public opinion data and records of visits to foreign countries by the U.S. president and secretaries of state from 2001 to 2006, we show that the effects of such visits were initially significantly large and positive, but weakened once the war in Iraq began and international media started reporting negative aspects of the "war on terror." Most interestingly, we find some evidence that high-level visits eventually exhibited a backlash effect: they turned opinion more strongly against U.S. policy than would otherwise have been the case.

We base our theoretical arguments on the political communication literature, but extend them to consider transnational dynamics. Specifically, we argue that U.S. leaders' credibility in the eyes of foreign publics is critical in shaping attitudes toward U.S. foreign policy. Although public opinion and transnational influence have traditionally been prominent concerns of liberal theories of international relations, recently not only liberals but also realists have emphasized their importance for U.S. foreign

<sup>1</sup>There are some recent studies examining media coverage of public diplomacy (Nisbet et al. 2004; Wang and Chang 2004), but they do not estimate the effects of public diplomacy per se on foreign public opinion.

policy success. From a liberal perspective, Joseph Nye argues that there is a “continual contest for legitimacy” in the post-2001 world, and this involves not only the dissemination of information as a source of “soft” power, but also the need for that information “to be believed” (Nye 2004, 28, 31). From a realist perspective, Stephen Walt argues that perceived “legitimacy of U.S. primacy” around the world is important for U.S. efforts to gain “active cooperation from other states” (Walt 2005, 165, 176).

Our results also have policy relevance. With reference to the Iraq war launched in 2003, the analysis indicates that U.S. public diplomacy, which expanded from 2004 onwards (particularly, in the Middle East), lost its effect as events eroded international trust. The eventual backlash effect is especially instructive. It appears that under conditions of lost credibility, increased public diplomacy efforts without substantial policy changes can actually cause more negative views of the United States than would doing nothing at all.

## Public Diplomacy and Foreign Public Opinion

In this section, first, we discuss the “public relations” aspect of high-level visits. Second, we connect public diplomacy to the existing literature on political communication and introduce our hypotheses, which focus on the perceived credibility of leaders. Finally, we argue that U.S. leaders’ messages have gradually lost such credibility during the post-9/11 period.

### High-Level Visits as Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy is overt state-directed activity which seeks to promote the national interest of a given state through informing and influencing foreign audiences (United States Information Agency Alumni Association 2006). It was clearly an important foreign policy tool for the George W. Bush administration, which became increasingly concerned with perception of its policies abroad. For example, in 2006, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld stated, “Our enemies have skillfully adapted to fighting wars in today’s media age, but . . . our country has not . . . . The longer it takes to put a strategic communications framework into place, the more we can be certain that the vacuum will be filled by the enemy” (British Broadcasting Corporation 2006). The increasing importance of public diplomacy in U.S. foreign policy is also evident in organizational changes of the

bureaucracy. The position of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, created in 1999, was strengthened in 2004 with an Office of Policy, Planning and Resources for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. The Under Secretary now guides the State Department’s programs and coordinates efforts across the foreign policy bureaucracy (United States Department of State 2006b; United States White House 2006).

Conceptually, public diplomacy is a form of transnational influence in which the government of Country *A* tries to affect domestic (usually mass) beliefs in Country *B* (Goldsmith, Horiuchi, and Inoguchi 2005). This includes a wide range of informational and citizen-exchange programs. In this paper, however, we focus on visits by one country’s political leader to another country, frequently conceived as a “package” of public diplomacy activities (Manheim 1994; Wang and Chang 2004). We assume that the single most important objective of high-level leaders’ international visits is to engage in conventional elite-level diplomacy, such as negotiations and dialogue with foreign leaders and/or attendance at multinational meetings. However, it should be underscored that leaders typically also use visits as a chance to engage in public diplomacy aimed at having an impact on the foreign public, including on their views of the visitor’s country or even support for particular policies.<sup>2</sup> For example, when U.S. President Bill Clinton traveled to China in 1998, he insisted on being allowed to address the Chinese people directly, and, indeed, gave two nationally televised speeches and answered questions on a radio call-in show. At the time, future Bush-administration official Paul Wolfowitz commented that those “few hours on Chinese television . . . were very useful for American interests” (Public Broadcasting System 1998). More recently, during her three-day visit to Australia in March 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had two joint press conferences with Australian officials, gave one TV and one newspaper interview, and attended a major sporting event covered widely by news media, among several other public diplomacy activities (United States Department of State 2006a). The visit

<sup>2</sup>The messages U.S. leaders convey during these visits might have multiple purposes and will not always be easily palatable for a mass foreign audience. We think, however, it is highly likely that they will craft their messages for mass audiences to be received positively and to enhance the standing of the United States and its policies. In any event, regardless of leaders’ intentions, which we cannot know with certainty, we expect that high-level visits have some effect on political attitudes among the foreign public, and we are interested in estimating such observable—intended or unintended—consequences of the visits.

received considerable media attention in Australia, as was clearly the intention.

### Conditional Effects of Public Diplomacy

Do such high-level visits affect foreign public opinion? To answer this question, we extend existing arguments that a political leader's attempt to sway opinion through now widely acknowledged mechanisms of "framing" (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2007a) and "priming" (e.g., Althaus and Kim 2006) is often conditional.<sup>3</sup> We believe this is especially relevant regarding a leader's transnational efforts to swing foreign opinion through public diplomacy, a situation in which cultural differences and limited time frames might pose extra challenges to effective political communication. More specifically, to develop our hypotheses, we draw on Entman's (2004, 10–17) "cascade" model, which highlights two variables influencing the effectiveness of political communication—*magnitude* and *congruence*. We also consider the literature suggesting the importance of the *credibility* of an information sender (Druckman 2001; Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey 1987).

Entman (2004) suggests that the influence of political communication on mass opinion can be exerted simply by increasing the magnitude, meaning the frequency and prominence, of communication around a particular issue from low to high, especially in the news media, thus increasing awareness and providing the initial priming and framing messages for most members of the public. However, when there is already high magnitude, for example if prominent elite debates have led to a well-informed public with strong opinions about a particular issue, there can be less scope for further influence on opinion.

Entman also argues that a leader faces considerable constraints on influence when there is a high degree of consensus around a particular issue, but the leader's message is "incongruent" with the dominant view. Influence can be easier when a leader's message is "congruent" with a dominant view. When there is no single dominant view because of considerable disagreement or controversy in society, the effectiveness of communication is potentially high. Elite messages, however, become "ambiguous"—congruent

with some peoples' views but incongruent with those of others—and their impact is muted or dependent on the media skills of the leader.

As Druckman (2001) and others argue, another factor conditioning influence on public opinion is an information sender's "credibility." There is considerable evidence from cognitive psychology that information from sources perceived as trustworthy is more likely to be accepted and believed than the same information from sources perceived as untrustworthy (e.g., Bloom and Weisberg 2007).

Combining Entman's model and the issue of credibility, we argue that the impact of a leader's transnational communication efforts on opinion about her country's foreign policy depends on the extant type of general image about her and her country among the foreign public: *credible*, *controversial*, or *noncredible*. We also suggest that the mass public will be divided in its views of the foreign leader based on political orientation. Several studies extend the finding that mass foreign policy beliefs are well-structured to publics outside the United States (Hermann and Yuchtman-Yaar 2002; Hurwitz, Peffley, and Seligson 1993; Jenkins-Smith, Mitchell, and Heron 2004). Structure varies across countries, but in general, members of the public can be categorized as positively oriented towards the foreign leader, negatively oriented, or undecided. Given these conceptual frameworks, we introduce our hypotheses.

First, a scenario of *credibility* will involve a degree of consensus about the high credibility of a foreign leader (and thus a lower degree of general negative views about her) and a relatively low magnitude of discussion in the public sphere resulting from a lack of controversy.<sup>4</sup> We expect that public diplomacy will be most effective in this scenario, even in challenging instances, such as the "war on terror." This is because public diplomacy will increase the magnitude of political communication on the issue, and the message, while imparting specific new information, will likely be congruent with dominant (positive) views about the country and leader. It will influence some who are negatively disposed to be either undecided or positive and move some who are undecided to be positively disposed towards the country and its policy.

In a situation involving more *controversy*, for example when debates have exposed foreign policy

<sup>3</sup>We acknowledge the recent literature on anti-Americanism and agree that other concepts, such as Katzenstein and Keohane's (2007) "polyvalence" of perceptions about the United States among foreign publics, are potentially important. In this paper, however, we do not rely on this literature, because such concepts do not necessarily help us understand U.S. leaders' transnational communication efforts, which are the focus of our investigation.

<sup>4</sup>It is important to point out that a general image of credibility does not automatically translate into support for particular foreign policies in the absence of public diplomacy. Especially when the foreign leader's policy involves risk, expense, or moral difficulty for the country she is visiting, the need for persuasive framing to gain support might be great.

“hypocrisy” or highlighted credible counterarguments, there will be increased doubt about the credibility of the foreign leader among some parts of the public. In the aggregate, the public’s mixed views mean that there will be ambiguity in how the message is received, thereby diminishing the effect of a foreign leader’s message. Also, wider media coverage of opinion leaders’ debates will create a greater magnitude of communication, and thus knowledge of competing arguments will cascade down to the mass public, leaving less room for influence in the crowded communication space. For these reasons, the effect of public diplomacy in this situation would be muted because fewer people in the negative or undecided groups might be moved towards positive views.

In a situation involving a *noncredible* leader image, there will be a general negative consensus about the credibility of the foreign leader, but communication magnitude might not be low, for example if negative issues are represented through “threat” frames which have high salience. We expect that the effect of public diplomacy in this scenario will be qualitatively different, because public diplomacy efforts in the spirit of the high-level visitor’s existing policies will be incongruent with negative views widely shared among opinion leaders and mass publics. They will generate even more negative discussions and coverage across the society, potentially contributing to a higher magnitude negative cascade of communication and generating unintended “negative priming” and/or “negative framing” effects. Namely, the public diplomacy message will increase attention to—prime negative evaluations of—the preexisting noncredible image of the foreign leader or country and/or recall the negative frames which are congruent with dominant negative views.

Therefore, in this scenario of noncredibility, there will be little scope to change negative views to undecided or positive, or to convince the undecided to take a positive view, because the public will not be receptive to the positive content of the message from a noncredible source. Rather, some positive views will be pushed to undecided or negative and some undecided views also pushed to negative. This sort of “backlash” effect is consistent with research showing negative effects on opinion of weak-inapplicable frames competing with strong-applicable ones (Chong and Druckman 2007b), of distrust towards a political leader (Levi and Stoker 2000, 489–90) and of general levels of trust for citizens’ negative evaluations of foreign countries (Brewer et al. 2004).

In sum, we propose the following three hypotheses:

*H1: In a credibility scenario, public diplomacy will have a net positive effect on foreign policy perceptions.*

*H2: In a controversy scenario, public diplomacy will have no effect or a muted net positive effect on foreign policy perceptions.*

*H3: In a noncredibility scenario, public diplomacy will have a net negative effect on foreign policy perceptions.*

These scenarios and their corresponding implications for public diplomacy might be arrayed on a continuum based on the degree of (non)credibility associated with a foreign country’s or leader’s image.

### **Declining U.S. Credibility during the Post-9/11 Period**

We believe that the period from September 11, 2001 until the U.S. invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003, is best characterized as one of credibility for U.S. foreign policy. Of course we recognize that this credibility was not unlimited or unblemished, given the skeptical perceptions of George W. Bush’s foreign policies from foreign audiences even before September 2001. But in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. image had a degree of credibility, as the well-known 12 September *Le Monde* headline exemplifies—“We are All Americans Now.”

The period beginning with the Iraq war, we think, can be characterized as one of high controversy about U.S. foreign policy. The U.S.-led invasion, without an enabling United Nations Security Council resolution, was largely unpopular, widely protested, and hotly debated; but claims about the dangers of Iraq’s weapons programs and terrorist links could still be considered plausible justifications for such action.

The situation turned to a noncredible one in 2004. There is room to debate when the turning point was, but we argue that the first significant event came in April 2004, when foreign publics were exposed to disturbing photos and stories of prisoner abuse by U.S. soldiers at the Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq. The erosion of credibility continued with subsequent events and revelations. Throughout 2004–06, the Iraqi insurgency was strong, highlighting both the failure of U.S. leaders to anticipate such developments and the plausibility of eventual U.S. defeat. In addition, the Central Intelligence Agency definitively and publicly concluded in a report, dated October 7, 2004, that the justification for the war, Iraq’s possession and production of weapons of mass destruction, was baseless.

We could find no multinational surveys repeatedly asking questions specifically about trust in, or credibility of, the United States during the period of investigation. Thus, we are unable to demonstrate with survey data a decline in such levels over time in many countries. However, a search of news sources around the world, using the *Factiva* database, reveals many hundreds of instances in which the words “credibility” or “trust” and “United States,” combined with other keywords including “opinion” and “foreign policy,” occur in close proximity.<sup>5</sup> As our framework would lead us to expect, the number of such articles increased sharply in early 2004 and has stayed at a high level afterwards (see Figure 1). Of course, not all such instances necessarily deal with issues relevant to this paper, but the dramatic change in frequency is compelling. We present several examples from around the world to demonstrate the plausibility of our assumption.

Shortly after the invasion of Iraq, the Nigerian *Vanguard* reported, “Today, the war has entered day 19 with the coalition forces in control of most of Iraq; yet not one WMD [weapon of mass destruction] has been discovered. One would have thought that U.S intelligence units which were responsible for this report would be able to lead the coalition to the sites of these weapons. Right now nobody except the converted in the coalition will believe the U.S if it were to announce discovery of any weapons for the simple reason that the country’s credibility has been severely dented by events so far” (Shobowale 2003). In early 2004, *The Times* of London quoted a United Kingdom Parliamentary commission report stating, “[T]he continued failure of the coalition to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq has damaged the credibility of the US and the United Kingdom in their conduct of the war against terrorism” (Charter 2004).

After the Abu Ghraib scandal broke, Beirut’s *Daily Star* ran an article under the headline “Revelations of Iraqi abuse deepen distrust of United States” (Gerges 2004). Shortly afterwards, a Palestinian academic argued in the same paper that “The US has lost the edge on the moral dimension. It has lost the trust of many in the Arab world who, for long, have considered it as the leader of the free world” (Sabella 2004). The increasing distrust was not only among

Arabs or Muslims. In a December 2004 poll in Japan, “the number of respondents who said they did not trust the United States rose eight points from the previous year to 53 percent, much higher than the 38 percent who said they did trust the United States” and a foreign ministry official explained this as likely “due to President Bush’s stance on unilateralism” (Anonymous 2004).

The perception seemed to persist still in 2007, with an editorial in India’s *The Hindu* arguing “The lies, deceit, spin, and manipulation of facts and analyses leading to the Iraq war have completely shot the credibility of the British and present American and Australian governments. . . . To compound their international credibility deficit, the leaders of the three countries that went to war insist, against all evidence, that things are going swimmingly well in Iraq. They see progress where others see daily carnage and weekly worsening of the security situation” (Thakur 2007).

These data are consistent with studies from various parts of the world showing a significant drop in trust for the United States in reaction to the invasion of Iraq and subsequent events, for example in Mexico (Juarez 2004), South Korea (Kim, Parker, and Choi 2006), China (Johnston and Stockmann 2007), and several Arab states (Chiozza 2007; Lynch 2007).

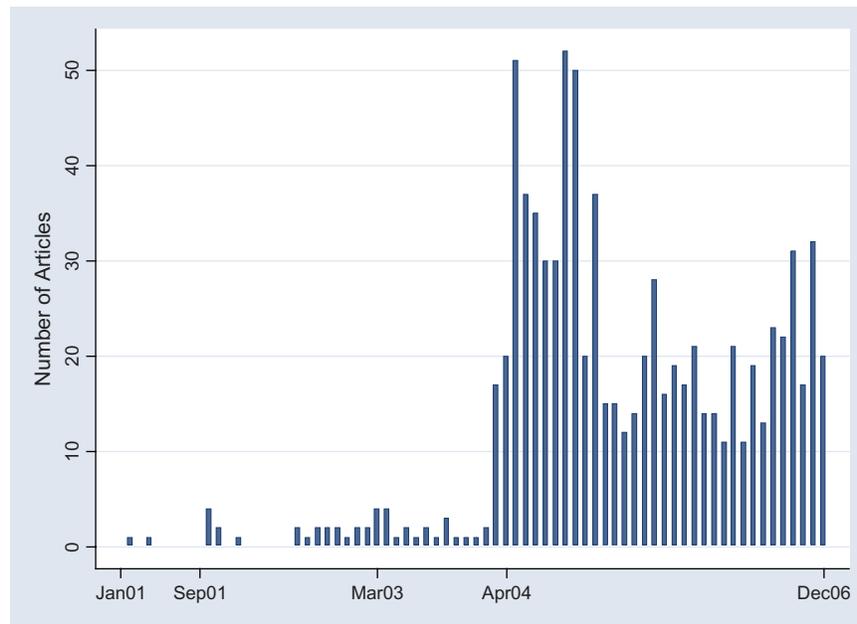
## Data and Variables

To test our three hypotheses, we use a number of surveys conducted after September 11, 2001 in 61 countries and two regions without full sovereignty (Hong Kong and Kosovo).<sup>6</sup> Specifically, we select 10 survey questions, which measure non-U.S. respondents’ attitudes towards the United States, from 19 multinational studies conducted by six organizations, including BBC World Service, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Gallup International, German Marshall Fund of the United States, GlobeScan with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), and Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (see online Appendix A at <http://journalofpolitics.org/> for sources and survey questions). Following the conventional wisdom in empirical studies of public opinion

<sup>5</sup>We note that *Factiva* is a limited database and only English language sources were searched. The numbers are therefore drawn from a sample, not all possible sources. We also note that academic analysis has come to similar conclusions. For example, Walt has argued forcefully that the U.S. lost “legitimacy” globally, primarily due to the Abu Ghraib scandal (Walt 2005, 168–69).

<sup>6</sup>Almost all of the existing multinational survey data are only available at the level of countries/regions, rather than at the level of individual respondents. Since there is a theoretical rationale for using aggregate data when investigating *collective* public opinion and foreign policymaking (Page and Shapiro 1992, 8, 15–34), we analyze aggregate data. For convenience, we use the term “country” rather than “country/region” in the rest of the paper.

FIGURE 1 Factiva Search Results: Articles Discussing the U.S. and Credibility



Note: The number of articles found in the *Factiva* database with the following conditions. (The “SAME” criterion indicates the search terms must be found in the same paragraph.) [Free Text] (\*istrust\* OR trust\* OR \*illegitima\* OR legitima\* OR credib\*) SAME ((United States OR America\* OR USA) AND (foreign policy OR public opinion OR poll OR international relations)). [Source] Newspapers: Africa Or Newspapers: Asia/Pacific Or Newspapers: Australia & New Zealand Or Newspapers: Canada Or Newspapers: Europe Or Newspapers: Latin America Or Newspapers: Middle East Or Newspapers: Top UK newspapers Or Newspapers: UK. [Subject] Editorial Or Crime/National Security Or Global/World Issues Or Politics/International Relations. [Language] English.

about war (e.g., Eichenberg 2005; Goldsmith, Horiuchi, and Inoguchi 2005; also see Berinsky and Druckman 2007), we use various survey items to capture a latent multidimensional concept—support for U.S. foreign policy after the 9/11 incidents.

To compare multiple survey items in a systematic manner, we recoded the responses to each survey item into three categories—the percentage of “positive,” “negative,” and “other” responses.<sup>7</sup> This standardization is appropriate to test our hypotheses because, as discussed earlier, we expect high-level visits to shift proportions of the mass public among these three categories of political attitudes towards U.S. foreign policy. Then, using the procedure detailed in online Appendix B, which is based on the “within transformation” (Wooldridge 2002, 267), we eliminated question-wording effects and kept one observation per survey (from one or more survey

items in a given survey). The standardized data are presented in online Appendix E.

Using such pooled data with the “country-survey” as the unit of analysis, we specify the following model:

$$\begin{aligned} Opinion_{it} = & Visit_{it|\phi} (b_1 + b_2 Period2_t + b_3 Period3_t) \\ & + b_4 Period2_t + b_5 Period3_t + b_6 Z_{it} \\ & + b_7 t + b_8 t^2 + b_9 t^3 + \delta_i + \varepsilon_{it} \end{aligned}$$

where our dependent variable ( $Opinion_{it}$ ) is the percentage of positive responses, negative responses, or other responses to questions asked in *Country*  $i = \{1, \dots, 63\}$  in a survey started on *Day*  $t$ , which is the elapsed date since September 11, 2001.<sup>8</sup> The total number of country-survey observations is 353 for 63 countries. The right-hand-side includes our key

<sup>7</sup>The “other” category includes “don’t know” and “refused,” as well as neutral responses (e.g., “no difference” or “neither”). See online Appendix A for all response categories.

<sup>8</sup>Within each country, no two surveys started on the same day. Thus, the subscript  $t$  serves as a survey identifier for each  $i$ . Also note that although all surveys in our dataset are components of larger multinational studies, the start dates for surveys in any given study are different across countries. Also see Footnote 12.

explanatory variable ( $Visit_{it|\phi}$ ), period-specific dummy variables ( $Period2_t$  and  $Period3_t$ ) and their interaction terms with  $Visit_{it|\phi}$ , other covariates ( $Z_{it}$ ), cubic-polynomial trend variables ( $t$ ,  $t^2$ , and  $t^3$ ), a country-specific fixed effect ( $\delta_i$ ); and an error term ( $\varepsilon_{it}$ ). The effect parameters to be estimated are  $b_1, \dots, b_9$ . The specification of each independent variable is given below.

The main explanatory variable is a Visit dummy, which is coded 1 if the U.S. president and/or the secretary of state visited *Country i* within  $\phi$  days (inclusive) before a survey in that country started on *Day t*, and 0 otherwise (visit dates are coded as the last day of the visit; see online Appendix C for the descriptions of all the cases with visits).<sup>9</sup> The issue of how long framing or priming effects might persist is just arising in the literature (Chong and Druckman 2007a, 118), and there is not yet useful theoretical guidance for choosing an appropriate length for our time lag ( $\phi$ ). In our preliminary analysis, however, we found considerable persistence. Specifically, the estimated effects tend to be fairly robust as long as we use four-to six-week lags (see online Appendix F for the results of robustness checks). The results reported in the next section are based on the five-week ( $\phi = 35$ ) lag. For example,  $Visit_{it|\phi} = 1$  when President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Colin L. Powell visited the United Kingdom on April 7–8, 2003 before the *Pew Global Attitudes Survey* began on April 29 in the United Kingdom. In our data, there are 38 observations with  $Visit_{it|\phi} = 1$ . The complete information about all 353 observations (the country, the name, and start date of the survey, the percentages of positive, negative, and other responses, and the date when the U.S. leader/s left the country if  $Visit_{it|\phi} = 1$ ) are presented in online Appendix E.

An important feature of our estimation strategy is that we expect causal heterogeneity depending on the period in which U.S. leaders traveled overseas after the 9/11 incidents. As discussed earlier, the effects of high-level visits on foreign public opinion are conditional on the three types of general image among the foreign public (*credible*, *controversial*, or *noncredible*), which roughly correspond to different post-9/11 periods. To estimate this heterogeneity, we add two period-specific dummies and their interaction terms with the key explanatory variable, the

high-level visit dummy.<sup>10</sup> Specifically,  $Period2_t = 1$  if a given survey's study period started on or after the day the war in Iraq began on March 19, 2003 but before the Abu Ghraib prisoner torture and abuse scandal was first revealed on April 28, 2004, otherwise  $Period2_t = 0$ .  $Period3_t = 1$  if a survey started on or after April 28, 2004 through December 2006, otherwise  $Period3_t = 0$ . For example, if a survey started two years after the 9/11 incidents,  $Period2_{t=730} = 1$  and  $Period3_{t=730} = 0$ . The Period 1 dummy is dropped due to perfect multicollinearity.

Descriptive statistics for our dependent variable tabulated by periods and the key explanatory variable (with or without a high-level visit) are shown in Table 1.<sup>11</sup> It shows that with a high-level visit by the U.S. president and/or secretary of state, as compared to without it, the average percentage of negative responses is *lower* by 8.93 points in Period 1, almost indifferent (+1.49 points) in Period 2, but *higher* by 6.28 points in Period 3. These results of our first-cut analysis are consistent with our hypotheses, but we need to examine these effects more carefully by controlling other covariates.

One important potential confounding factor is time. It is important to control for the fact that the timing of surveys varies widely and that the nature of U.S. foreign policy, and perception of it across all countries (regardless of whether U.S. leaders visited them), are by no means constant during the period of investigation. To account for such temporal factors not captured by our period dummies, we add the number of days since September 11, 2001 (divided by 100 for convenience), its squared term, and its cubed term ( $t$ ,  $t^2$ , and  $t^3$ ). A recent study suggests that this straightforward set of linear and nonlinear time-trend controls is effective to model temporal dependence (Carter and Signorino 2007).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>In preliminary analysis, we also attempted to estimate heterogeneous effects depending on *who* visited a foreign country—Powell alone, Rice alone, Powell and Bush, or Rice and Bush—in each period. (In our data, there was no case with a visit by Bush alone.) We found that there is no significant difference between Rice and Powell and that presidential visits tend to decrease, albeit slightly, the percentage of negative responses while increasing the percentage of other responses. Since the number of observations for each type of a visit in each period becomes inevitably small, however, we regard these findings as only tentative. For the same reason, we cannot fully investigate other heterogeneous effects such as those based on different objectives and varying lengths of visits.

<sup>11</sup>The number of surveys in each country and period is presented in online Appendix D.

<sup>12</sup>Since we use 19 multinational studies (for 353 surveys in 63 countries), one might suggest we use 18 study-specific dummies. We do not take this approach, because the timing of country-specific surveys *within each multinational study* varies considerably. For example, the *Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2006 Survey* was conducted from July to November 2006, for different dates in different countries (see online Appendices A and E).

<sup>9</sup>The data source is the Office of the Historian, the U.S. Department of State (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/>). We carefully verified all the visits during the period of investigation and excluded instances of visits with no evidence of public appearances.

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics of Dependent Variables by Periods and Explanatory Variable

Period	Explanatory Variable	Dependent Variable	Surveys	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	
1	Without visit	pos %	132	34.30	14.44	12.88	87.76	
		neg %	132	48.74	16.34	6.65	82.07	
		oth %	132	16.98	12.35	0.03	57.03	
	With visit	pos %	9	31.99	15.54	10.38	59.11	
		neg %	9	39.81	16.54	13.13	53.40	
		oth %	9	28.18	9.08	10.03	38.09	
	Difference	pos %			-2.31			
		neg %			-8.93			
		oth %			11.20			
2	Without visit	pos %	78	32.43	16.69	7.18	86.37	
		neg %	78	51.74	15.47	7.77	83.48	
		oth %	78	15.88	10.41	0.10	51.03	
	With visit	pos %	11	34.13	12.94	9.08	54.31	
		neg %	11	53.22	15.50	25.67	77.48	
		oth %	11	12.74	5.50	0.10	19.99	
	Difference	pos %			1.70			
		neg %			1.49			
		oth %			-3.14			
3	Without visit	pos %	105	31.80	17.36	3.18	84.20	
		neg %	105	50.70	17.55	2.28	78.38	
		oth %	105	17.50	7.81	5.33	43.56	
	With visit	pos %	18	27.32	10.35	7.18	48.19	
		neg %	18	56.98	7.74	46.32	73.23	
		oth %	18	15.74	7.70	5.33	34.33	
	Difference	pos %			-4.49			
		neg %			6.28			
		oth %			-1.76			

Note: The dependent variables are the percentages of positive (pos), negative (neg), and other (oth) responses to questions relating to U.S. foreign policy. The key explanatory variable is coded 1 if the U.S. president and/or the secretary of state visited and left a given country within five weeks before the first day of a survey (inclusive), and 0 otherwise. Period 1 is *before* the war in Iraq started on March 19, 2003. Period 2 is *after* the start of the war in Iraq but *before* the Abu Ghraib prisoner torture and abuse scandal was first revealed on April 28, 2004. Period 3 is *after* April 2004 through December 2006.

Second, we add a country fixed-effect ( $\delta_i$ ). This can powerfully control a range of observable and unobservable attributes, which are country-specific but time-invariant during the period of investigation—after the 9/11 incidents through 2006. These include historical relationships with the United States, sociodemographic structures (e.g., a population structure of religious denominations), and/or political culture (e.g., a tendency of the foreign public to like or dislike the United States before the 9/11 incidents).

Although these fixed-effects and time-trend variables should control a range of relevant covariates, there remain country-specific but time-variant factors ( $Z_{it}$ ), which may correlate with both the foreign publics' attitudes toward U.S. foreign policy ( $Opinion_{it}$ ) and the U.S. leaders' decisions to visit

abroad ( $Visit_{it|\phi}$ ).<sup>13</sup> Specifically, it appears from the data we have collected that U.S. leaders tend to visit developed European democracies (e.g., the United

<sup>13</sup>Since there are some missing values, the number of valid observations with these controls is slightly smaller (343), as compared to the number of observations for estimations without the controls (353). In our preliminary analysis, we collected data from many sources, tried a number of other variables, but decided to drop variables which proved consistently insignificant (see online Appendix H for details). We also considered adding a lagged dependent variable. Although a lagged dependent variable often serves as a powerful control, some argue that its inclusion is often an atheoretical after-thought (Plümper, Troeger, and Manow 2005). Adding it in panel data also introduces methodological complications. More importantly, a problem specific to our data is that by adding it, we inevitably drop a large number of observations, particularly for Period 1. Nevertheless, the results for models with a lagged dependent variable are largely consistent in significance and sign with the results presented here.

Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy), other important allies (e.g., Turkey and South Korea), and countries which play major roles in global affairs (e.g., Russia and China) more frequently than others. The country-specific fixed effects already control geographical considerations and well-formed historical relationships with long-time economic and political partners. However, to control some potentially nuanced changes of public opinion in, and patterns of U.S. visits to, these countries during the post-9/11 period, we also include *GDP per capita (log)*, *UN voting index* of similarity between General Assembly votes for a given country and the United States, and regime type measured by the *Polity score*.<sup>14</sup> In addition, both high-level visits and foreign public attitudes may be correlated with whether a “significant” number of soldiers from a given country were killed in the Iraq war and/or the Afghanistan war in a given year. We therefore include a dichotomous variable (*Soldiers killed*) coded as 1 if this number is greater than 10, and 0 otherwise.<sup>15</sup> All these covariates are yearly data, and we use values from the year prior to the one in which a survey was conducted.

### Estimated Effects of a High-Level Visit

For each percentage of positive, negative or other responses, we run OLS regressions with country fixed-effects and our trend variables—one set with our four control variables ( $Z_{it}$ ) and another without. We expect that adding these controls should not substantially change the results, but we present both sets of results as a robustness check.

An important advantage of OLS regressions is that we can easily interpret the marginal effect of a high-level visit ( $Visit_{it\phi} = 1$ ). The interaction terms for visits in Periods 2 and 3 will also tell us directly the sign and significance of the *difference* between

the effect of a visit in Period 1 and each subsequent period. The overall effects in Period 1 ( $Period2_t = Period3_t = 0$ ), Period 2 ( $Period2_t = 1$  and  $Period3_t = 0$ ), and Period 3 ( $Period2_t = 0$  and  $Period3_t = 1$ ) are  $\hat{b}_1$ ,  $\hat{b}_1 + \hat{b}_2$ , and  $\hat{b}_1 + \hat{b}_3$ , respectively. The significance of these effects in Period 2 and Period 3 can be readily tested with a null hypothesis that a linear combination of the two coefficients is zero. By comparing estimated coefficients across three different models using the percentages of positive, negative, and other responses as dependent variables, we can evaluate not only whether a high-level visit moves foreign publics’ attitudes, but also the direction and magnitude of the effect.

There are, however, three disadvantages. First, since our data are a collection of surveys conducted by various organizations in varying sets of countries at different periods, there is a highly unbalanced panel structure with unequal spacing and gaps. Therefore, the OLS regressions may not fully take into account complex within-country correlations. Second, the OLS regressions do not impose a restriction that the sum of predicted percentages should be 100%. By estimating the three percentages separately without this restriction, we may over- or underestimate the effects of high-level visits. Finally, by running three independent regressions, estimated marginal effects tend to be inefficient, thereby producing large standard errors.

To cope with the first problem, and to further check the robustness of our OLS results, we also estimate generalized estimating equation (GEE) models (Zorn 2001).<sup>16</sup> The second and third problems can be addressed by running seemingly unrelated regressions (SUR) with the log-ratios of positive vis-à-vis other responses, and negative vis-à-vis other responses, as dependent variables (Tomz, Tucker, and Wittenberg 2002). There are double merits of using the two log-ratios instead of three percentages: they properly impose a restriction that the predicted percentages sum to 100%, and they reduce the total number of parameters to be estimated.

<sup>14</sup>GDP per capita (purchasing power parity) data are from the IMF, in current U.S. dollars (<http://www.imf.org/external/data.htm>). Regime type data are from Polity IV, using the standard index ranging from -10 for a fully authoritarian state to +10 for a fully democratic state (<http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>). UN voting data are from Erik Voeten’s website (<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/ev42/UNVoting.htm>), and we create our annual index using the proportion of General Assembly votes for each country which were identical to the U.S. vote.

<sup>15</sup>The data sources are CNN (<http://edition.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2004/oef.casualties/index.html>), and Icasualties (<http://icasualties.org/oif/>). We tried a number of different specifications, but this threshold yields the most significant effect for a stronger control.

<sup>16</sup>In the GEE models, we add two additional country-specific and time-invariant controls, which tend to be significant in our preliminary analysis with many different model specifications. They are the percentage of the population for each country that is Muslim from the CIA World Factbook (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>) and a measure of commonality between alliance “portfolios” of the United States and each country (in 2000) based on Signorino and Ritter (1999). Note that these variables are dropped in OLS regressions with country-specific fixed effects due to perfect multicollinearity.

The estimated marginal effects of a high-level visit in each period based on the three approaches (OLS, GEE, and SUR) are very similar (see online Appendix F for the results).<sup>17</sup> Therefore, we only present estimates of OLS regressions in Table 2. Models 1–3 include country fixed-effects and time-trend controls, while Models 4–6 include these and the four other control variables.<sup>18</sup> As expected, the estimated effects of a high-level visit in each period are very similar between the two specifications. This implies that the control variables do not have strong correlations with the Visit dummy and its interaction terms, as long as country-fixed effects and trend factors are properly controlled. Hereinafter, therefore, we only discuss the coefficients with the controls (Models 4–6).

In Period 1 (from 2001 until the invasion of Iraq in 2003), a high-level visit by U.S. leaders was an effective tool of public diplomacy. Table 2 suggests that a high-level visit increased the percentage of positive responses (+8.20 points) and decreased the percentage of negative responses (–16.83 points). The impacts of such public diplomacy are statistically significant and substantial. We attribute this to high post-9/11 perceptions of credibility for U.S. foreign policy, in line with Hypothesis 1. Table 2 also shows another interesting finding. A visit had a significantly positive effect on the percentage of other responses, suggesting that a U.S. leader's visit to a foreign country increased the proportion of people who have ambivalent attitudes toward the United States or who are reluctant to express their views. We will come back to this after discussing the main findings for Periods 2 and 3.

The estimated coefficients of the two interaction variables (shown in Table 2) suggest that the effects of a high-level visit significantly weakened after the invasion of Iraq. As U.S. foreign policy lost international credibility, the effectiveness of its leaders' public diplomacy declined. In order to assess the

validity of our hypotheses in more detail, a closer look at the effect for each period is in order. As explained earlier, we can do so by summing estimated coefficients for the Visit dummy and an interaction variable (the Visit dummy  $\times$  the Period 2 dummy or the Visit dummy  $\times$  the Period 3 dummy).

In Period 2 (March 2003–April 2004), there still remained effects of public diplomacy in the pro-U.S. direction. A high-level visit increased the percentage of positive responses (+2.42 = 8.20–5.78 points) and decreased the percentage of negative responses (–0.07 = –16.83 + 16.76 points), but the magnitudes of these effects are much smaller than those in Period 1. As U.S. foreign policy becomes more controversial around the world, influence is still possible but reduced, as anticipated in Hypothesis 2.

A melt-down of U.S. influence is evident in Period 3 (April 2004–December 2006). With the Abu Ghraib scandal and major military and administrative setbacks in Iraq, there appears to be a complete loss of credibility for U.S. foreign policy. When the president or secretary of state visited a country, their public diplomacy efforts did not have a positive effect. Table 2 shows that a high-level visit *decreased* the percentage of positive responses (–1.07 = 8.20–9.27 points), while *increasing* the percentage of negative responses (+2.95 = –16.83 + 19.78 points). Consistent with Hypothesis 3, the powerful (negative) images and basic facts in the news cannot be displaced by public diplomacy efforts. This backlash effect suggests that a high-level visit by U.S. leaders causes people to be *more* aware of U.S. policy and *more* disposed to give negative responses when asked about it within the five weeks after a visit. We call this effect negative priming or negative framing to emphasize the unintended outcome.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that the interaction variables have significantly negative and large effects on the percentage of other responses: –10.92 for the Visit dummy  $\times$  the Period 2 dummy and –10.44 for the Visit dummy  $\times$  the Period 3 dummy. The magnitudes of the negative effects are larger than

<sup>17</sup>To evaluate the marginal effect of a high-level visit based on the SUR regressions, we calculate the predicted values of the log-ratios, given particular values of the key variables ( $Visit_{it|d}$ ,  $Period2_t$ , and  $Period3_t$ ) while holding other variables at their means. Then, applying the inverse logistic function, we transform each set of log ratios into predicted percentages. To estimate uncertainty, we use a stochastic simulation technique (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003; also see King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000). The results of simulation are graphically presented in online Appendix G.

<sup>18</sup>Although our control variables show some interesting results, given space limitation, we focus on interpreting the main variables.

<sup>19</sup>The *difference* between the effects of a visit in Period 1 and Period 2 (or Period 3) is mostly significant, as the significantly negative coefficient of interaction variables in Table 2 shows. Joint significance tests of linear combinations of coefficients fail to reject the null hypothesis for a visit in Period 2 or 3 considered separately, however. We believe that this is a consequence of inefficient estimations based on three independent OLS regressions. A more efficient approach based on SUR regressions shows statistically significant effects (consistent with our hypotheses, small but positive in Period 2, negative backlash in Period 3, see online Appendix F).

TABLE 2 Estimates of OLS Regressions

Model	1	2	3	4	5	6
Dependent Variable	pos %	neg %	oth %	pos %	neg %	oth %
Visit	9.30*** (3.39)	-18.06*** (4.32)	8.76*** (2.99)	8.20** (3.31)	-16.83*** (4.22)	8.62*** (3.03)
Visit × Period 2	-5.43 (4.52)	16.43*** (5.76)	-10.96*** (3.98)	-5.78 (4.42)	16.76*** (5.64)	-10.92*** (4.05)
Visit × Period 3	-9.71** (4.04)	20.20*** (5.15)	-10.44*** (3.56)	-9.27** (3.92)	19.78*** (5.00)	-10.44*** (3.59)
Period 2	-4.06** (2.02)	-1.47 (2.57)	5.58*** (1.78)	-4.02** (2.01)	-1.46 (2.56)	5.51*** (1.84)
Period 3	-7.58 (4.63)	-2.09 (5.90)	9.78** (4.08)	-7.52 (4.56)	-1.81 (5.81)	9.41** (4.17)
Days since Sep. 11	0.13 (0.95)	3.13** (1.21)	-3.22*** (0.83)	-1.05 (1.00)	4.42*** (1.27)	-3.34*** (0.91)
Days since Sep. 11 (sq.)	0.16 (0.14)	-0.35* (0.18)	0.18 (0.12)	0.29** (0.14)	-0.49*** (0.18)	0.19 (0.13)
Days since Sep. 11 (cu.)	-0.01* (0.00)	0.01* (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)
GDP per capita (log)				24.70* (13.33)	-43.21** (17.00)	18.40 (12.21)
UN voting index				-9.11 (15.83)	-10.37 (20.18)	19.43 (14.50)
Polity score				1.87** (0.73)	-2.52*** (0.94)	0.64 (0.67)
Soldiers killed				-7.24*** (2.36)	8.20*** (3.00)	-0.93 (2.16)
Constant	31.27*** (1.89)	44.91*** (2.40)	23.79*** (1.66)	-205.59* (123.60)	462.63*** (157.61)	-155.92 (113.21)
Number of Surveys	353	353	353	343	343	343
Number of Countries	63	63	63	59	59	59
F-test for all $\delta_i = 0$	13.68	7.12	4.98	11.79	6.62	4.88
R-square (within)	0.092	0.101	0.171	0.166	0.169	0.177
R-square (between)	0.155	0.005	0.003	0.018	0.005	0.010
R-square (overall)	0.001	0.026	0.086	0.009	0.015	0.000

Note: All models include country fixed effects  $\delta_i$ . Standard errors are in parentheses.  
\*significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%. Also see Note in Table 1.

the magnitude of the positive effect of the Visit dummy (+8.62) in Period 1. This means that a high-level visit during Periods 2 and 3 *decreased* the proportion of other responses: foreign publics are more strongly motivated to express either positive or negative attitudes toward the United States with a high-level visit than without. Recall that a high-level visit has a directly opposite effect in Period 1. This adds further support for Hypothesis 3 in particular: in a noncredibility scenario, those who are undecided before the visit will be moved towards negative views, not positive, by public diplomacy efforts. These notable differences—for neutral or undecided views in different periods—are worth further investigation.

## Discussion

Our analysis demonstrates not only the strong potential for transnational influence on foreign publics through high-level visits, but also the conditionality of that influence. The key conditioning factor we identify is credibility. A U.S. leader perceived as credible abroad, even to the somewhat limited extent that this was so for George W. Bush or Colin Powell before March 2003, can have a substantial impact on public opinion about the United States and its foreign policy in the country he or she visits. As that credibility is diminished, however, our findings clearly show a loss of influence and indicate the potential for negative backlash.

While existing studies have noted that leaders who lack credibility might be ineffective in moving public opinion (Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey 1987) and that lost legitimacy and growing distrust of the United States have the effect of reducing U.S. influence in international affairs (Nye 2004), our finding of a considerable backlash effect to U.S. public diplomacy efforts expands and revises this understanding by highlighting the potential for unintended *negative* consequences of political communication efforts. Leaders who feel they have “nothing to lose” by attempting to persuade a disenchanted public might be mistaken, at least in conditions like those the U.S. leadership found itself in vis-à-vis foreign publics after April 2004.

Fundamentally, our results also point to foreign publics which are responsive to direct U.S. messages and open to influence. There has been scant empirical evidence of such dynamics in past research. Further, we suggest specific mechanisms through which public diplomacy works (or does not), based on insights from the study of political communication. If it is remembered that high-level visits are continuous parts of leaders’ itineraries, then the perpetual, cyclical nature of global agenda setting becomes clearer. We believe that our analysis breaks new ground by providing insight into the complex dynamics of transnational mass communication, and influence on foreign opinion about international affairs.

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