

## THE OBAMA EFFECT IN THE ARAB WORLD

By Ryan J. Suto  
Syracuse University

### Abstract

This paper tests the Obama Effect hypothesis with respect to the Arab world. The paper first presents popular uses of the term and then discusses the thin scholarly literature on the topic. For quantitative data, the paper uses longitudinal data from the Annual Arab Public Opinion Poll from 2004 to 2011, with supplemental data from the Pew Research Center. Furthermore, the paper analyzed data on the Arab Spring in the context of a possible Obama Effect and policy implications for the future of U.S. foreign policy. The paper found insufficient support for the hypothesis due to a lack of theoretical foundation or statistical support in the Arab world. It should be noted that this study was limited due to the lack of survey questions tailored to test this specific hypothesis. Lastly, the paper made suggestions for future U.S. foreign policy in the Arab world as well as for future research.

### Key Words

USA, Obama, Obama Effect, elections, public opinion, Arab Spring, agenda setting, reputation management, foreign policy, campaigns

### Introduction

In the popular parlance of the news media, one can read the headline “Obama Effect” across the world, from places like South Korea,<sup>1</sup> Ireland,<sup>2</sup> and Britain.<sup>3</sup> Most writers and pundits use the term in the context of a vague notion of popularity or soft power regarding U.S. President Barack Obama, but what does it mean? This paper first discusses the relevant scholarly works on the subject and then defines the term. The data from the Annual Arab Public Opinion Poll is used to quantitatively assess the claims implicit in the term Obama Effect with respect to the Arab world. The support—or lack thereof—for the Obama Effect hypothesis is discussed. Recent changes with respect to the Arab Spring are also discussed. This information is combined with the longitudinal information gathered from the Arab Public Opinion Poll mentioned above to formulate U.S. foreign policy suggestions regarding the Arab world for the next president. Future research is also suggested.

<sup>1</sup> Kim Tae-gyu, “Where has Obama Effect gone?” *The Korea Times*, 2009, accessed May 10, 2012, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2009/01/123\\_38254.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2009/01/123_38254.html).

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Lynch, “We need an Irish politician who has the Obama Effect,” *Herald*, 2008, accessed May 10, 2012, <http://www.herald.ie/opinion/we-need-an-irish-politician-who-has-the-obama-effect-1466153.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Marcus, “The Obama Effect reaches NATO,” *BBC News*, 2009, accessed May 10, 2012, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7983833.stm>.

Since at least the events of September 11, 2001 scholars and public figures have postulated about the existence and nature of “Anti-Americanism,” or anti-American sentiment—particularly in the Arab world.<sup>4</sup> Many pundits blamed much of these attitudes on the policies and personality of U.S. President George W. Bush.<sup>5</sup> Since 2008, however, the popular attitudes of political observers have claimed that Obama has garnered much more favorable international public opinion than his predecessor. Scholars have claimed that Obama’s election to the presidency in late 2008 “was marked by an outpouring of support and celebration in public outside the United States.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, many news and some academic articles describe the ramifications of a supposed Obama Effect on public opinion. The implication of these articles being that the election of Barack Obama has lifted the reputation of the U.S. around the world.

While the exact origin of the term Obama Effect is unknown, it was in use before the 2008 U.S. presidential election. On June 21, Jennifer Parker of ABC News wrote, “there is a widespread belief that U.S. foreign policy ‘will change for the better’ after the inauguration of the new president next year.”<sup>7</sup> Parker goes on to quote *New York Times* columnist David Brooks as stating, “[t]he Barack Obama effect is real.”<sup>8</sup> In 2009, Michael Rubin wrote, “many commentators... suggested that an Obama Effect could usher in a new era of hope and change in the Middle East, and a pro-American outcome in Lebanese elections earlier this month seemed to cooperate with the theory.”<sup>9</sup> In 2010, CBS News’s Brian Montopli suggested the Obama Effect influenced a majority of people to view the U.S. “as a positive force in the world.”<sup>10</sup> Perhaps most interestingly, a movie entitled Obama Effect, produced by Arc Entertainment, was released in July 2012. The movie’s official website states that the main character “becomes obsessed with the ideal of change that Obama represents for Americans.”<sup>11</sup> While the information available about the movie does not offer a definition or explanation of the title, the use of the title itself shows the extensive popularity of the term in general media.

### Literature Review

First, a theoretical basis for the Obama Effect must be investigated. To begin, Dennis Bromley studied corporations specifically, and organizations more generally, to find a relationship between member reputation and organizational reputation.<sup>12</sup> Bromley defined organizational reputation as the agreement between stakeholders or members of an external interest group regarding the organization’s attributes.<sup>13</sup> An organization’s reputation is both a product—with effects—and a process of change over time.<sup>14</sup> The study goes on to give reason for possible connections between a leader’s and their organization’s reputation. Those connections are, inter alia, the visual identity of an organization and the collective nature of an organization as a group of individuals. As individuals affect the organization’s actions, there exists a human psychological tendency toward the anthropomorphization of the organization. This is what Freling and Forbes would call brand personality,<sup>15</sup> which, “is reinforced by conflating the non-human attributes of an organization with the psychological attributes of its leading or salient members.” Visual identity is an important aspect of reputation, and the leader of an organization is quite often that visual identity.<sup>16</sup> The paper later states, “the corporate identity of an organization is infused with the personal

<sup>4</sup> Barry Rubin, “The Real Roots of Arab Anti-Americanism,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 6 (2002): 73-85.

<sup>5</sup> Julia Sweig, “Anti-Americanism—It’s not all Bush’s fault,” Council on Foreign Relations, 2006, accessed May 10, 2012, <http://www.cfr.org/foreign-policy/history/anti-americanism---s-not-all-bushs-fault/p11292>.

<sup>6</sup> Craig Hayden, “Beyond the ‘Obama effect’: refining the instruments of engagement through U.S. public diplomacy,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 55 no. 6 (2011): 784-802, 785.

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Parker, “Obama brightens world’s view of U.S.,” ABC News, 2008, accessed August 8, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Vote2008/story?id=5054401&page=1>.

<sup>8</sup> Parker, “Obama brightens world’s view of U.S.,” ABC News, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Rubin, “The Obama Effect? Iran’s election result proves the US formula in the Middle East is not working,” *NY Daily News*, 2009, accessed August 8, 2012, <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/obama-effect-iran-election-result-proves-formula-middle-east-working-article-1.373867>.

<sup>10</sup> Brian Montopli, “The ‘Obama Effect’? Perceptions of U.S. improve abroad,” CBS News, 2010, accessed August 9, 2012, [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544\\_162-20002840-503544.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20002840-503544.html).

<sup>11</sup> “Obama Effect,” Arc Entertainment, accessed August 9, 2012, <http://obamaeffectmovie.com/about/>.

<sup>12</sup> Dennis Bromley, “Relationships between personal and corporate reputation,” *European Journal of Marketing* 35, no. 3/4 (2001): 316-334.

<sup>13</sup> Bromley, “Relationships between personal and corporate reputation,” p. 321.

<sup>14</sup> Bromley, “Relationships between personal and corporate reputation,” p. 320.

<sup>15</sup> Traci H. Freling and Lukas P. Forbes, “An empirical analysis of the brand personality effect,” *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 14, no. 7 (2005): 404-413.

<sup>16</sup> Bromley, “Relationships between personal and corporate reputation,” p. 317-19.

attributes of its leaders. This effect is most likely in the early stages of a firm's history when it is being successfully run by a charismatic individual. Conversely, when a previously successful firm is failing, scapegoats are blamed for the failure."<sup>17</sup>

Davies and Mian conducted a study measuring the reputation among U.K. voters of political parties and their leaders between 2001 and 2005.<sup>18</sup> Generally, the study provided support for the assertion that, "a close relationship between party and leader image, and that reputation is transferred between the two."<sup>19</sup> More specifically, their results showed that party image and leader image co-varied. However, the results could not show causation, leaving unanswered: whether party image may influence leader image, leader image may influence party image, or the existence of any other causal relationship between these or other variables.<sup>20</sup>

Dragojlovic investigated a possible Obama Effect in Canada. He focused on priming, which, "occur[s] when the mention of a specific consideration in one context (the prime) increases the accessibility of that consideration, leading to an increase in the use of that trait in later evaluations of a social target."<sup>21</sup> The study found that the mention of Obama in an unrelated question led participants to evaluate the U.S. more positively than the control group.

Forsberg, while dismissing the Obama Effect as a singular explanatory factor for improved views of the United States, presented the following graph that he titled "The Obama Bounce:"<sup>22</sup>

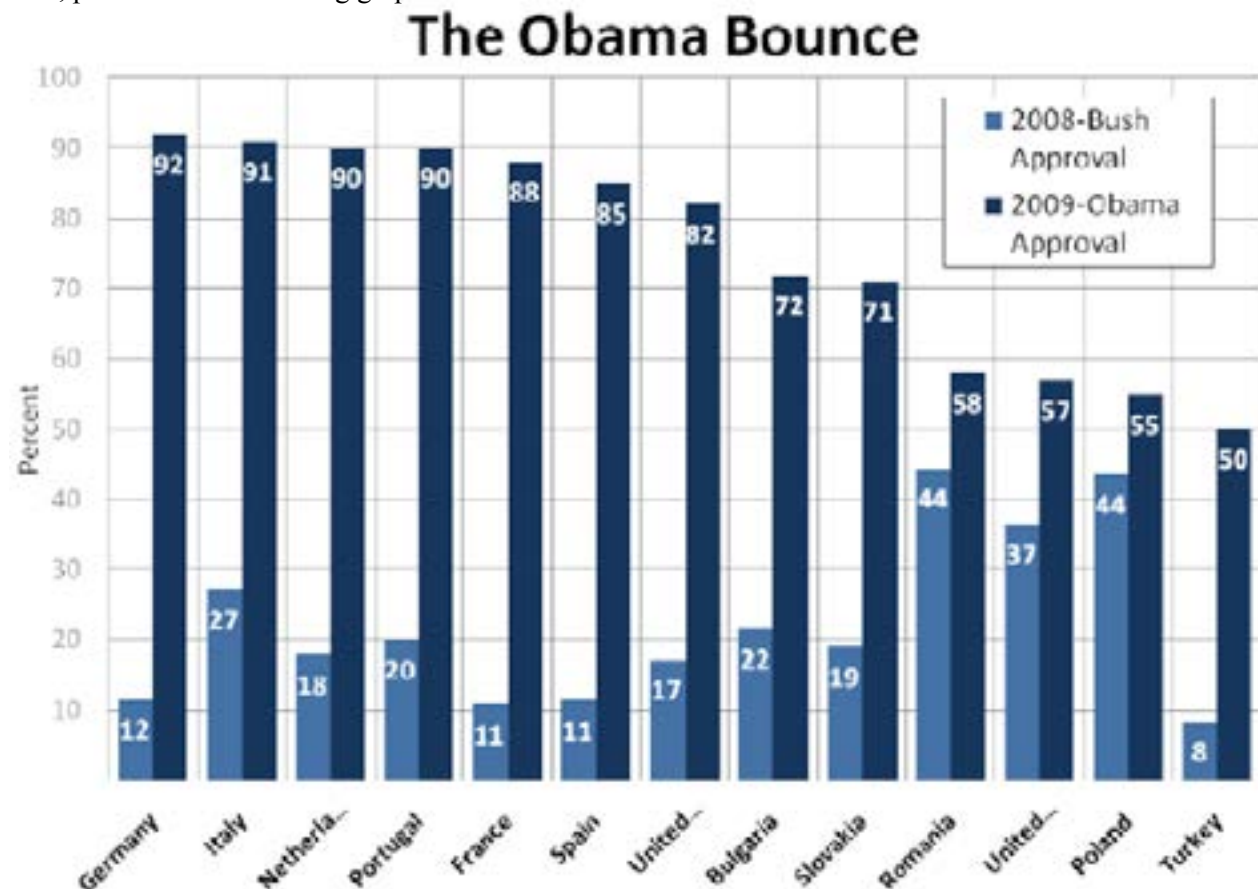


Figure 1 23

Forsberg writes, "[t]ransatlantic trends reported that the approval of the way the U.S. president handled foreign policy issues increased from 19 in 2008 to 77 in 2009 when the respondents were assessing Obama instead of

17 Bromley, "Relationships between personal and corporate reputation," p. 321.

18 Gary Davies and Takir Mian, "The reputation of the party leader and of the party being led," *European Journal of Marketing* 44(3/4), (2010): pp. 331-350.

19 Davies and Mian, "Reputation of the party leader": p. 344.

20 Davies and Mian, "Reputation of the party leader": p. 345.

21 Nicolas Dragojlovic, "Priming and the Obama effect on public evaluations of the United States," *Political Psychology* 32, no. 6 (2011): 989-1006, 991.

22 Tuomas Forsberg, "The rise and fall of criticism towards the United States in transatlantic relations: from anti-American to Obamania," *Handbook of Transatlantic Relations*, eds. Germond, Jussi Hanhimäki and Georges-Henri Soutou, Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, pp. 218-230.

23 Herein I label as 'figures' any graph which has been obtained directly from various cited sources; I label as 'tables' any graph which I have constructed myself from the Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey, described below.

Bush.<sup>24</sup> These data show a possible direct link between the occupant of the U.S. presidency and general approval toward the United States. This would render the U.S. presidential election itself an exercise in U.S. public diplomacy.

As written in the 2010 BBC World Service Poll, "global views of the United States have improved markedly over the last year while views of many countries have become more negative ... For the first time since the BBC started tracking in 2005, views of the United States' influence in the world are now more positive than negative on average."<sup>25</sup> The BBC was not alone in this finding. The Pew Research Center wrote, "the image of the United States has improved markedly in most parts of the world, reflecting global confidence in Barack Obama."<sup>26</sup> Accompanying their reports, Pew provided the following tables:

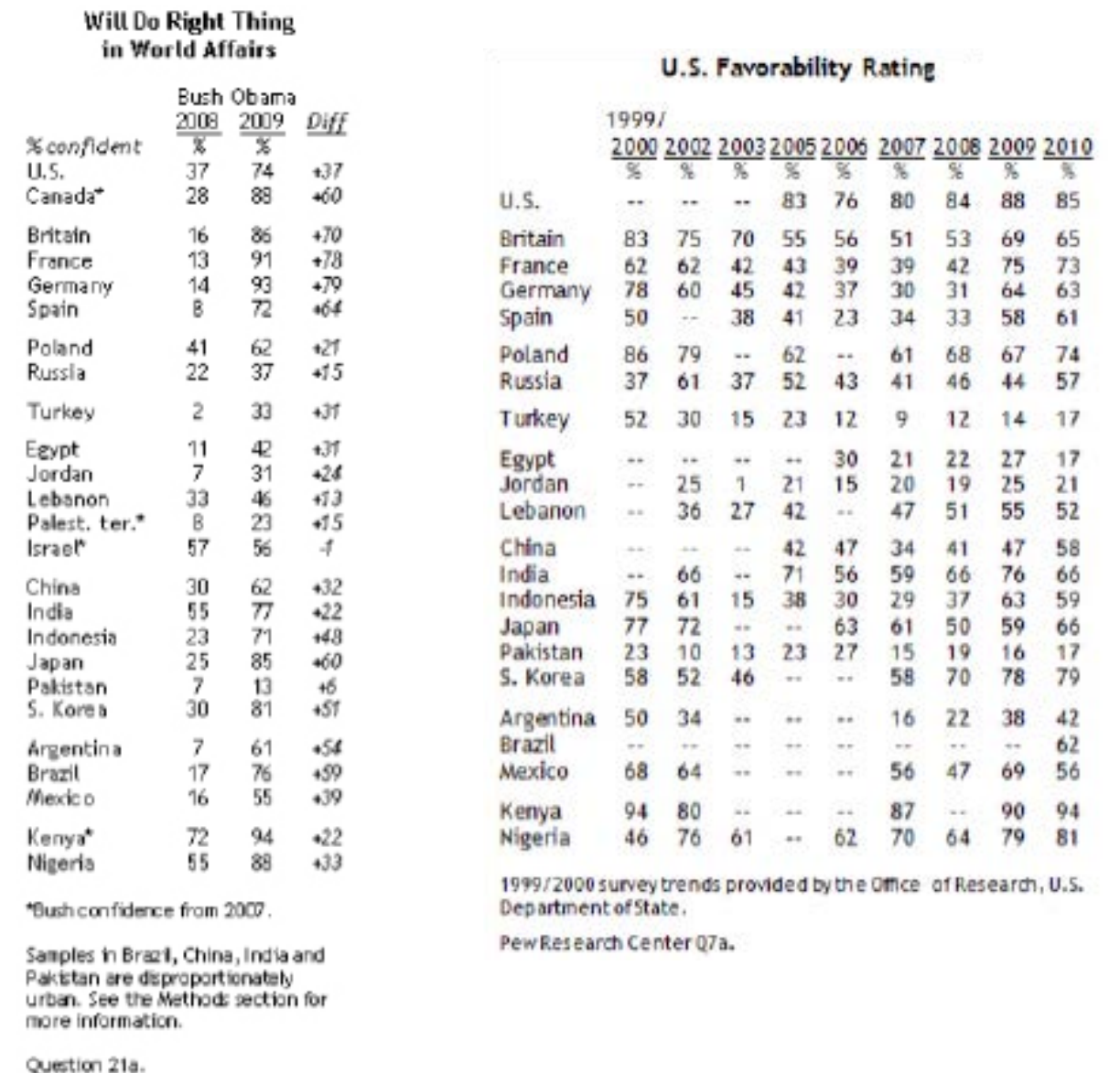


Figure 2

On the table above it is clear that every state polled, save for Israel, has more confidence that Obama will "do the right thing" internationally than Bush did. However, to the knowledge of the researcher, no study has presented an Arab-centric study of a possible Obama Effect. This is surprising for two reasons. First, because of Obama's connections to Islam through his father, step-father, and his time growing up in Indonesia. Second, because Obama has been largely viewed as a more neutral arbiter in the Arab-Israeli conflict than past U.S. presidents. Moreover,

24 Forsberg, "Criticism towards the United States," 2010.

25 2010 BBC World Service Poll. BBC. 18 April 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/160410bbcwpoll.pdf>

26 Pew Research Center, "Confidence in Obama list U.S. image around the world," Pew Global Attitude Project (2009), accessed on May 10, 2012, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2009/07/23/confidence-in-obama-lifts-us-image-around-the-world/>.



the Arab world is where much academic focus has been regarding anti-American sentiment in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

Based on the literature review, in this paper the following definitions will be used:

Reputation: The agreement between members of an external interest group regarding an actor's attributes.  
 Obama Effect: The improvement of U.S. reputation among foreign publics due to the reputation of Obama among the same foreign publics.

Research Question: Does there exist a statistically significant Obama Effect in Arab countries?

Hypothesis: There exists a measureable Obama Effect in Arab countries, demonstrated by a positive correlation between an increase in approval of Obama and a measured increase in approval of the United States.

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, with lingering memories of the war in Iraq, the military involvement in Libya, and the continuing humanitarian crisis in Syria, Arab public opinion toward the United States is as consequential as ever. While not a separate hypothesis, this paper will also discuss the possible importance of an Obama Effect on the upcoming U.S. presidential election.

*DATA SECTION*

*Methods*

This paper uses the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development, University of Maryland/Zogby International Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey data from 2004-2006 and 2008-2011. Results from before 2004 are unavailable, the survey was not conducted in 2007, and the 2012 data were not available at the time of writing. Each year populations in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia (except for 2011), and the United Arab Emirates are sampled. While certain years provided readily attainable state-specific data, this is not used below—as such analysis would complicate the results section beyond use. However, these states represent the full geographic and demographic range of the Arab region, from the far west of North Africa to the Persian Gulf, including states relatively religiously monolithic to states with complex religious mixes. The polling also occurred in multiple locations in each state. Thus, the populations sampled should be sufficiently representative of the larger Arab population. When possible, other sources are used to diversify the sources of data. The sample sizes were generally between 3,000 and 4,000 interviews for each year, with margins of error of approximately 1.6 percent.

The surveys covered a wide range of questions about topics such as: identity, global leaders, domestic and regional politics, the Arab-Israeli conflict, media, the United States, and Arab governments. While some of the questions were asked consistently, many questions were added or removed as the years went on. Thus, the data paint only partial pictures on certain subjects. However, the Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey represents the most thorough opinion polling data from Arab states. In contrast, the Pew Survey only measured three Arab states on issues that are not specific to the region. The data presented will address issues related to the hypothesis presented: perception of the United States, perception of the president of the United States, and the context of the Arab Spring.

*Results*

The results are presented thematically. First, data about countries around the world are presented in order to show the United States in context. Next, questions about the United States, specifically, are shown to better illustrate Arab views. Third, questions about political elites, both internationally and in the United States, are presented. Last, questions pertaining to the recent Arab Spring are discussed.

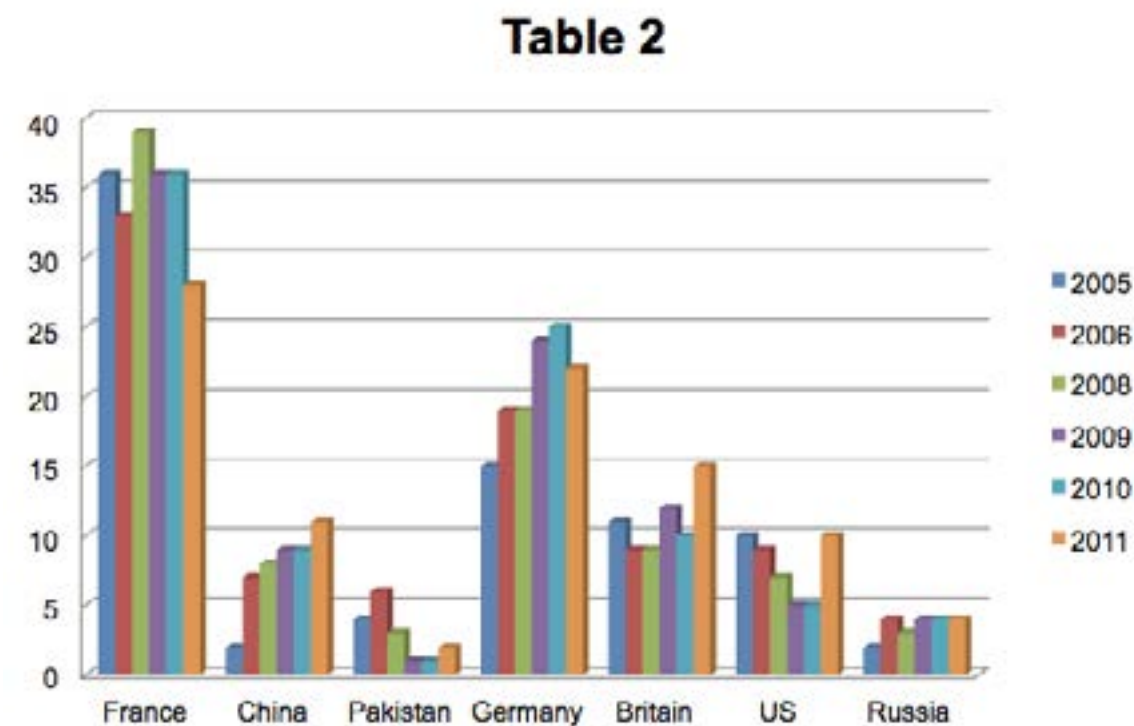
**United States in perspective.**

Table 1: In a world where there is only one superpower, which of the following countries would you prefer to be that superpower?

Table 1: If 1 superpower, which do you prefer?							
	France	China	Pakistan	Germany	Britain	U.S.	Russia
2005	21	13	10	10	7	6	5
2006	19	16	14	10	4	8	7
2008	24	13	6	13	7	8	7
2009	23	14	5	23	8	8	7
2010	23	14	3	25	7	8	7
2011	10	23	7	15	5	7	12

This question presents the United States in relation to other powers. The context of the approval of the United States in relation to other prominent states would be helpful in knowing to what extent perception of the United States changes among the respondents during the given time period. Table 1 shows that respondents' opinion toward the United States to be remarkably stable over a period of seven years. On average, the United States is less preferred than France, Germany, and China, but is similar to Pakistan, Britain and Russia with respect to being a superpower.

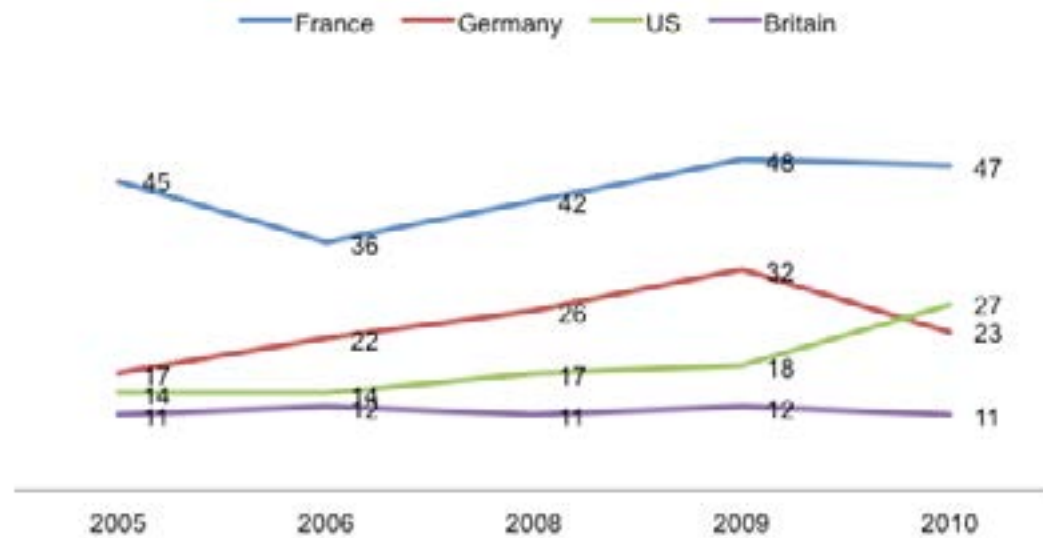
Table 2: If you had to live in one of the following countries, which one would you prefer most?



As with Table 1, Table 2 presents the United States in context, this time asking a slightly different question, but ultimately aiming at the same views. This table shows that those polled would generally rather live in the United States than Pakistan or Russia. It is interesting to note the spike the United States sees in 2011, while 2009 and 2010 are at relatively low levels. Also interesting to note is the literal rise of China on this graph—no other state has such a steady increase.

Table 3: Name two countries where you think there is the most freedom and democracy for their own people.

Table 3



Other notable selections: Sweden (2005: 8%, 2009: 6%, 2010: 9%); Switzerland (2008: 18%, 2010: 12%); Canada (2009: 15%, 2010: 15%); Japan (2008: 11%, 2010: 13%); Australia (2009: 19%) and Italy (2010: 8%).

Table 3 shows whether views of the United States may be related to the political conceptions of freedom and democracy. This shows that the percent of respondents who think American citizens live in the most freedom and democracy is rising. While the rise is consistent, from 2008 (under Bush) to 2009 (under Obama), the increase is statistically insignificant.

Table 4: Name two countries that you think pose the biggest threat to you (minor results omitted).

Table 4

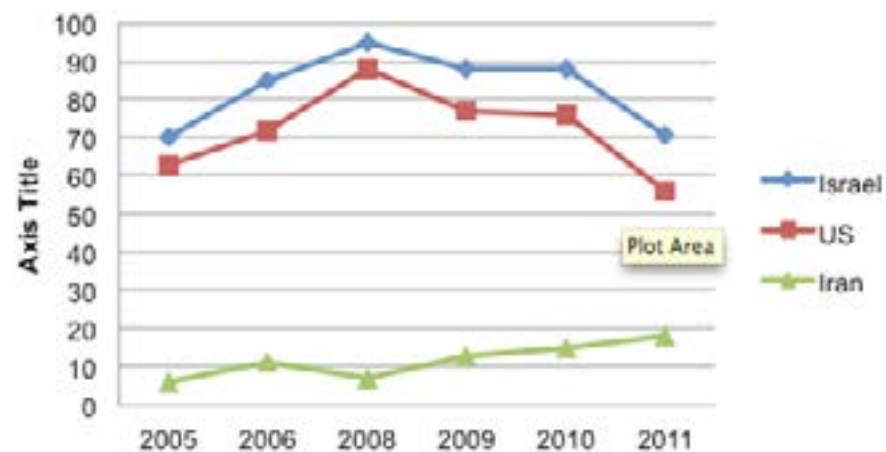


Table 4 perhaps stands in contrast to the other three tables presented in this section. The United States is in a clear second place for the state which respondents feel poses the biggest threat to them. This table was chosen to provide a clearer picture of respondents' views of the United States.

Overall, the data paint a very mediocre picture: in terms of Arab public opinion, the United States seems to be generally below average. Views toward the United States over the seven-year span of the data are generally stable and seem to show no influence from Obama's election in the 2009 or 2010 surveys. While the United States is perhaps feared more than other countries, it is generally on par with Britain in most aspects.

U.S.-specific questions.

Table 5: Generally speaking, is your attitude toward the United States: Very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

Table 5

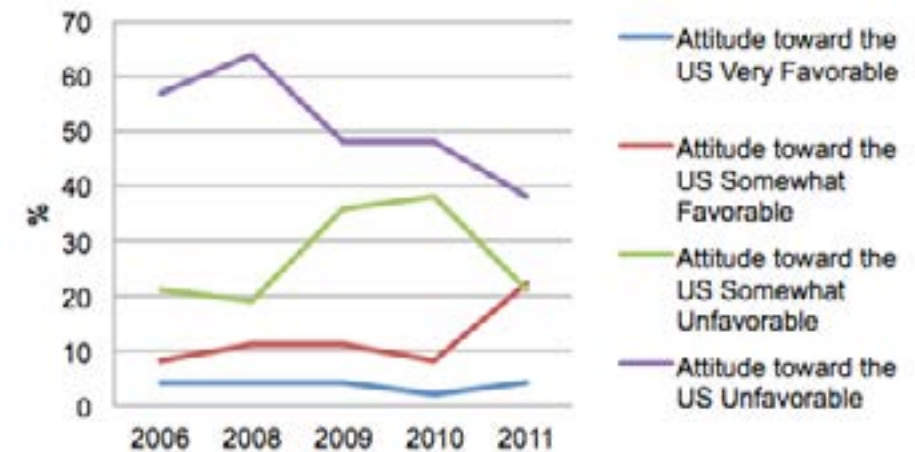


Table 5, and subsequent data, get more directly to the point of attitudes of respondents toward the United States. This table shows that since 2008 'very unfavorable' and 'somewhat unfavorable' attitudes toward the United States have been dropping quite significantly, and in exchange 'somewhat favorable' has been on the rise.

Table 6: Which two of the following factors do you believe are most important in driving American policy in the Middle East [The following options were given]:

Controlling oil, protecting Israel, weakening the Muslim world, preserving regional and global dominance, preventing the spread of WMD/nuclear weapons, promoting peace and stability, spreading human rights, protecting democracy, or fighting terrorism (2008-2011 only).

Table 6

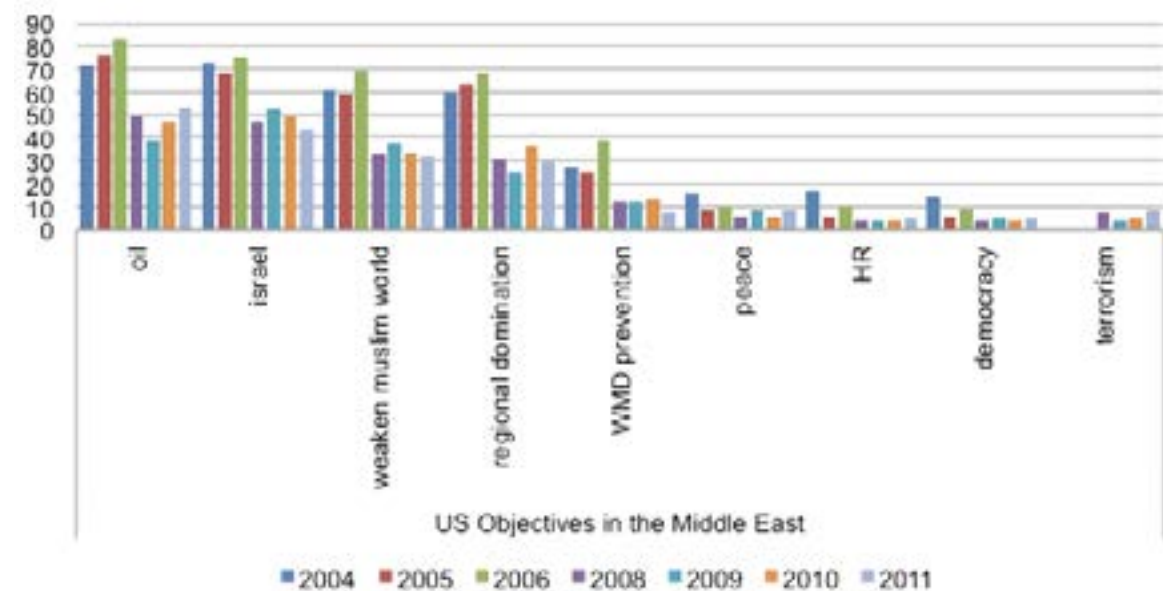


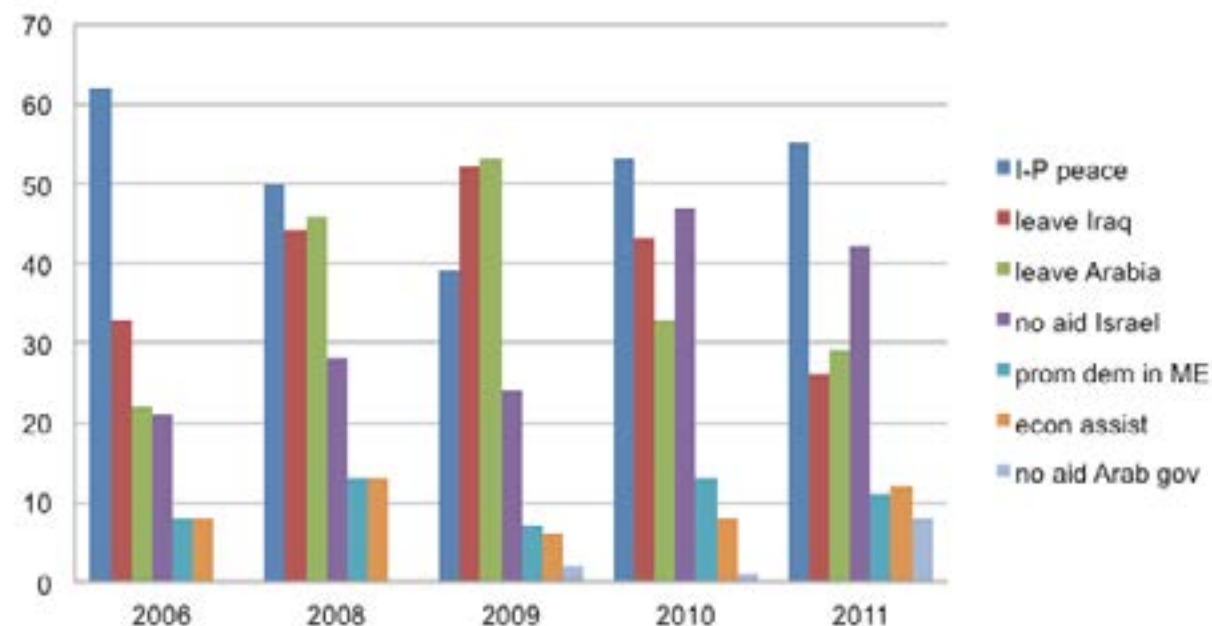
Table 6 gives a more comprehensive understanding of why the respondents view the United States as they do— by knowing what they think about U.S. foreign policy toward their region specifically. This seems to show that views of what drives U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East have seemed to moderate over the years; only one answer gets over a 50 percent response rate, that being 'controlling oil' at 53 percent. Overall the top four answers (controlling oil supplies, protecting Israel, and having power over the Middle East and weakening the Muslim world) all generally involve the United States protecting interests and maintaining power in the Middle East.



Table 7: What two steps by the United States would improve your views of the United States the most? The following were given choices:

Israel-Palestine peace agreement, withdrawal from Iraq, withdrawal from the Arabian Peninsula, stopping aid to Israel, promote democracy in the Middle East, more economic aid to the region, or stopping aid to Arab governments.

Table 7



By showing us how the United States can better its image, we can get a fuller understanding of what people think drives the image of the United States most. Regarding U.S. policy, Table 7 shows that in 2006 Arabs were almost singularly focused on an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, with leaving Iraq a notable second choice. As of 2011 a peace agreement is rebounding, with stopping aid to Israel a strong second. The next most popular options are leaving both Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula.

Table 8 (left): Would you say your attitudes toward the United States are based more on American values or American policy in the Middle East?

Table 9 (right): How much confidence do you have in the United States?

	US Values	US Policy
2005	11	80
2006	11	70
2008	12	80
2009	16	78

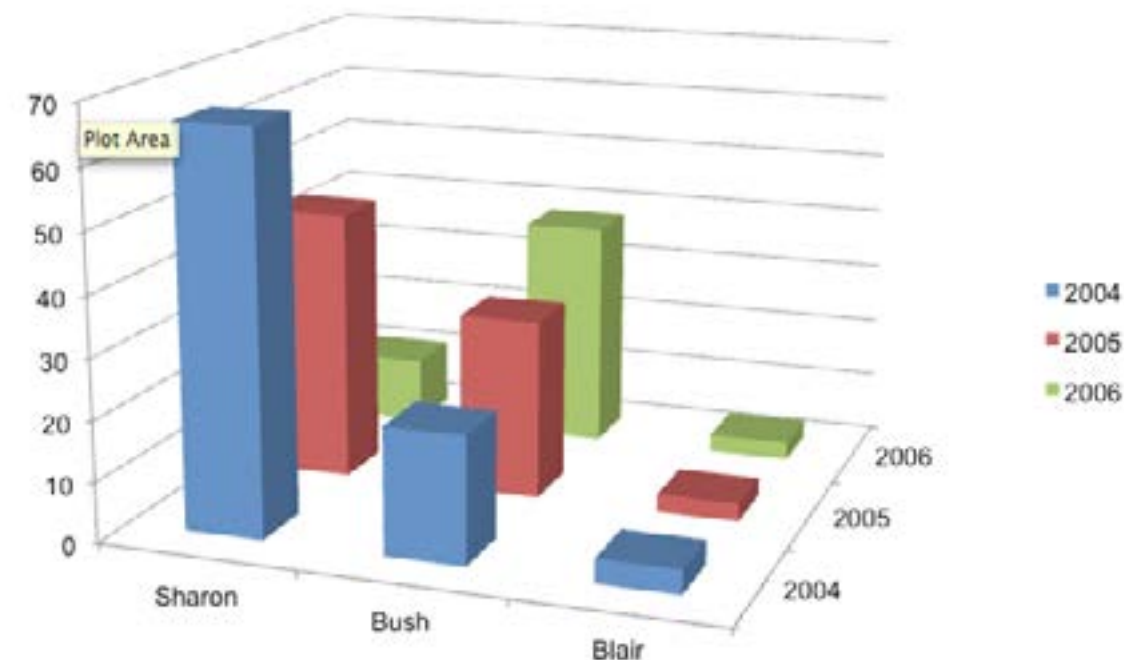
	a lot	some	none
2006	3	25	69
2008	4	25	70
2009	3	30	66

Here we see a very clear picture: Table 8 shows that respondents feel that they develop their attitudes toward the United States based on policy, not values. Table 9 shows a wide 'lack in confidence' in the United States. These findings relate directly to the perception of the United States among respondents.

The U.S.-specific results show that those surveyed generally have an unfavorable view of the United States (which appears to be improving slowly) that is based on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. They further feel that U.S. foreign policy revolves around protecting American interests and maintaining its power in the region. The fastest way the United States could improve this view would be to work toward peace between Israel and Palestine, but generally, most have no confidence in the United States.

Elites.

Table 10: Please tell me which world leader (outside your own country) you dislike most?



This table was included to show the relation of the perception of President Bush to other world leaders. Here we can see that Bush steadily gained in 'dislike' among those surveyed; whereas, Sharon decreased significantly in 'dislike' over the same period. This question was not asked after 2006. However, when asked what world leaders they most admire, respondents answered with President Bush at a rate of 2 percent in 2005. The question featured a U.S. president again after 2009. Those polled responded with President Obama at levels of 2 percent, 2 percent, and 4 percent for 2009, 2010, and 2011, respectively. Thus, no significant change seems to exist between Bush and Obama, although the evidence here is weak due to the infrequency of data and the numbers being near the margin of error.

In 2006 pollsters ask about feelings toward recent U.S. political changes, such as the Democrats winning majorities in Congress and former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld leaving the Bush Administration. While 16 percent of respondents viewed the changes as positive and 8 percent as negative, a majority (58 percent) felt these changes would make no difference. Similarly, in 2008 pollsters asked which candidate for U.S. president would best advance peace in the Middle East. The respondents seemed to favor Democrats: 18 percent answered Obama, 13 percent Clinton, and only 4 percent answered McCain. Most respondents, however, said they don't follow U.S. politics (20 percent) or felt that regardless of whom would win, the policy would remain the same (32 percent)—both gaining more responses than any candidate.

The Pew Research Center found, "for the most part, opinions of the United States among Muslims in the Middle East remain largely unfavorable, despite some positive movement in the numbers in Jordan and Egypt." As such, presented below are two figures from Pew: on the left is the United States favorability among various states from 2000 – 2010, and on the right is Muslim confidence in Obama in various states in 2009 and 2010.

U.S. Favorability Rating										Muslim Views of Obama			
	1999/2000									% Confident	2009	2010	Change
	2000	2002	2003	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010				
U.S.	--	--	--	83	76	80	84	88	85	Turkey	33	23	-10
Britain	83	75	70	55	56	51	53	69	65	Egypt	41	31	-10
France	62	62	42	43	39	39	42	75	73	Lebanon	45	35	-10
Germany	78	60	45	42	37	30	31	64	63	Shia	25	7	-18
Spain	50	--	38	41	23	34	33	58	61	Sunni	64	61	-3
Poland	86	79	--	62	--	61	68	67	74	Jordan	30	26	-4
Russia	37	61	37	52	43	41	46	44	57	Indonesia	70	65	-5
Turkey	52	30	15	23	12	9	12	14	17	Pakistan	13	8	-5
Egypt	--	--	--	--	30	21	22	27	17	Nigeria	81	77	-4
Jordan	--	25	1	21	15	20	19	25	21	Based on Muslims only.			
Lebanon	--	36	27	42	--	47	51	55	52	Pew Research Center Q34a.			
China	--	--	--	42	47	34	41	47	58				
India	--	66	--	71	56	59	66	76	66				
Indonesia	75	61	15	38	30	29	37	63	59				
Japan	77	72	--	--	63	61	50	59	66				
Pakistan	23	10	13	23	27	15	19	16	17				
S. Korea	58	52	46	--	--	58	70	78	79				
Argentina	50	34	--	--	--	16	22	38	42				
Brazil	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	62				
Mexico	68	64	--	--	--	56	47	69	56				
Kenya	94	80	--	--	--	87	--	90	94				
Nigeria	46	76	61	--	62	70	64	79	81				

1999/2000 survey trends provided by the Office of Research, U.S. Department of State.  
Pew Research Center Q7a.

Figure 3

Indeed, viewing Figure 3 above, one can see clearly that opinions among respondents toward the United States are largely stable, despite the change in administrations. This figure points to at least a weak relationship between the views of the United States and the president of the United States at the same point in time.

Table 11: How would you describe your views of President Barak Obama of the United States?

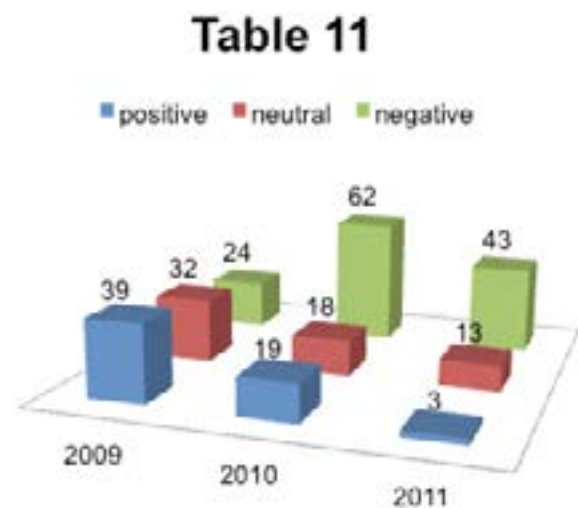


Table 11 shows that Obama faced mostly positive but generally mixed views upon entering office. Still, positive views of him have been decreasing since then. Interestingly, in 2009 the following question was also asked: After a few weeks of the Obama Administration, how would you describe your attitudes toward the policy in the Middle East? While only 6 percent of respondents answered 'very hopeful', a full 45 percent described themselves as 'somewhat hopeful'. Twenty eight percent were neither hopeful nor discouraged, and a combined 14 percent were either somewhat or very discouraged.

Table 12: How would you describe your attitudes toward the Obama Administration's policy in the Middle East?

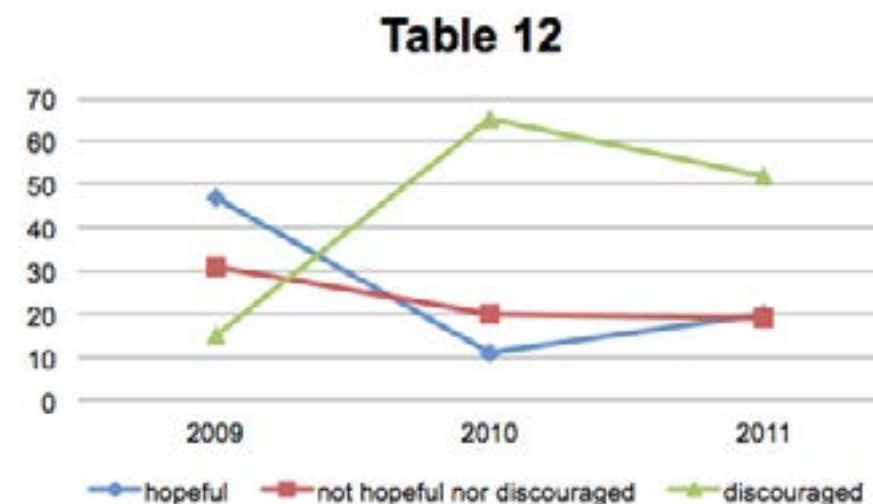


Table 13: Which of the following is the closest to your views in describing U.S. President Barack Obama: Unfavorable view of him and I am pessimistic about his foreign policy, favorable personal view of him, but I don't think the American system will allow him to have a successful foreign policy, or favorable personal view of him and I am hopeful about his foreign policy.

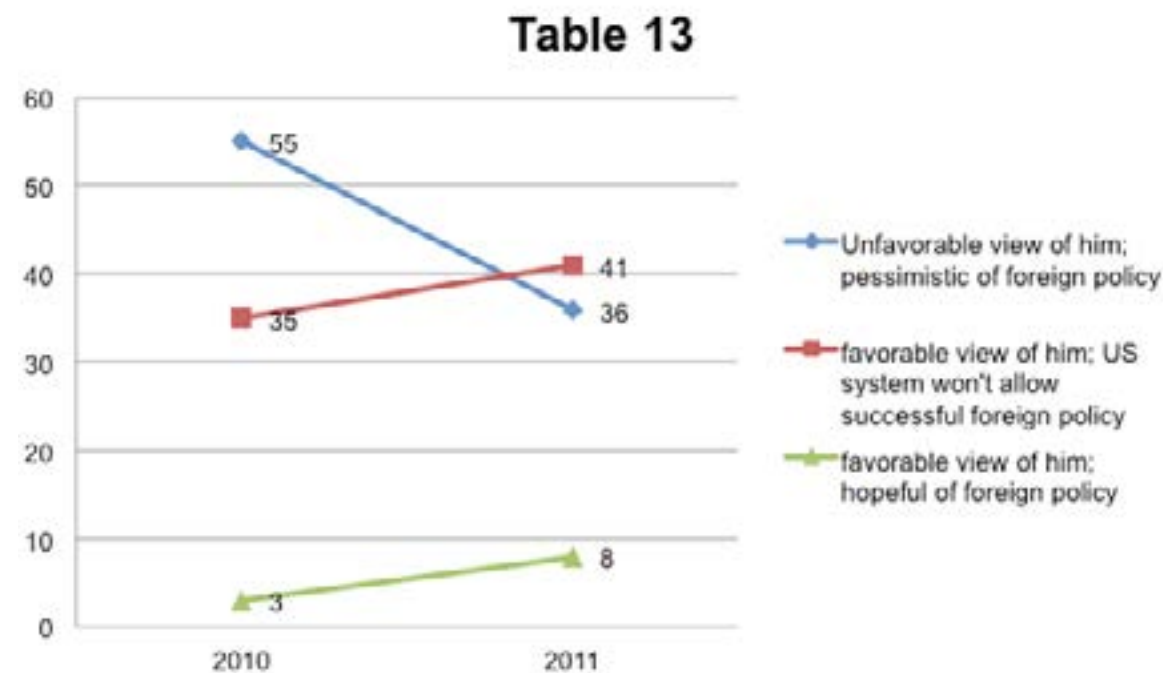


Table 13 shows a large fall in discouragement toward Obama, which matches the fall in discouragement over the same years in Table 12.



Figure 4: In 2011 the Pew Research Center asked about favorability toward the United States and confidence in Obama.

U.S. Favorability					Confidence in Obama				
	% Favorable			Change 10-11*		% A lot/Some confidence			Change 10-11*
	2009	2010	2011			2009	2010	2011	
Jordan	25	21	13	-8	Jordan	31	26	28	+2
Lebanon	55	52	49	-3	Lebanon	46	43	43	0
Egypt	27	17	20	+3	Egypt	42	33	35	+2
Palest. ter.	15	--	18	+3	Palest. ter.	23	--	14	-9

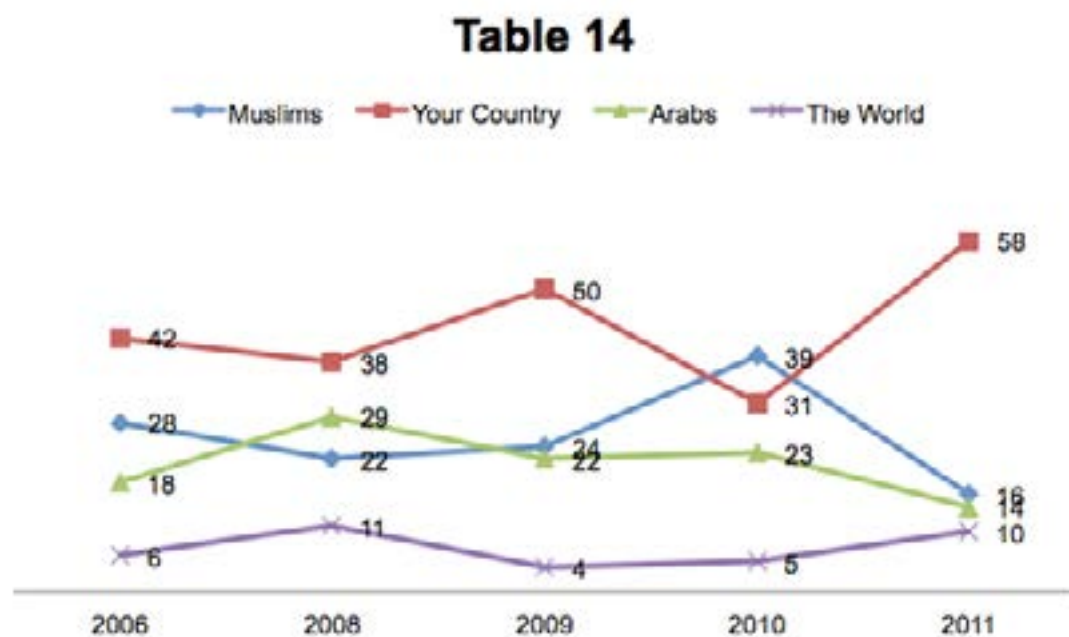
Figure 4 shows that over the past three years the public opinion results in four Arab states toward Obama and the United States generally do not seem to correlate in any significant way.

The results from this section of data show that Arabs appear to generally be skeptical to the notion that elites can single-handedly change U.S. foreign policy. Some of the evidence suggests that Arabs do not view Obama and Bush in significantly different light. Nonetheless, the takeaway about Obama from these data is that Arabs were generally excited about the prospects of his presidency in 2008 and 2009, but by 2010 became jaded toward it. However, it seems that 2011 has brought Obama more favor with/among respondents. These ups and downs seem to show less of an Obama Effect than concrete hopes for and reactions to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

**Arab Spring.**

The 2011 survey was conducted in October of that year; late enough to capture the views of many who saw the Arab Spring take hold in their countries and region.

Table 14: When your government makes decisions, do you think it should base its decisions mostly on what is best for: Muslims, your country, Arabs, or the world?



This table regards the secondary interest of this paper; the Arab Spring. Table 16 presents some of the most interesting results: after the Arab Spring, the percentage of respondents who felt that their government should base decisions on what is best for their state increased by 27 percent; whereas, those who felt those decisions should be best for Muslims or Arabs fell by 23 percent and 9 percent, respectively.

Figure 5: Looking at the international reaction to the events in the Arab world in the past few months, which two countries do you believe played the most constructive role?

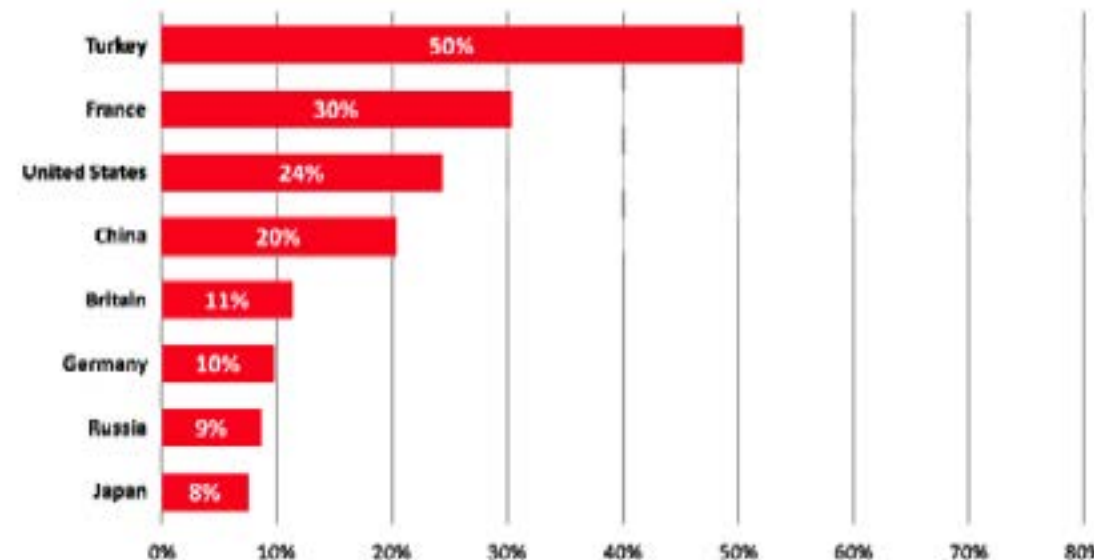
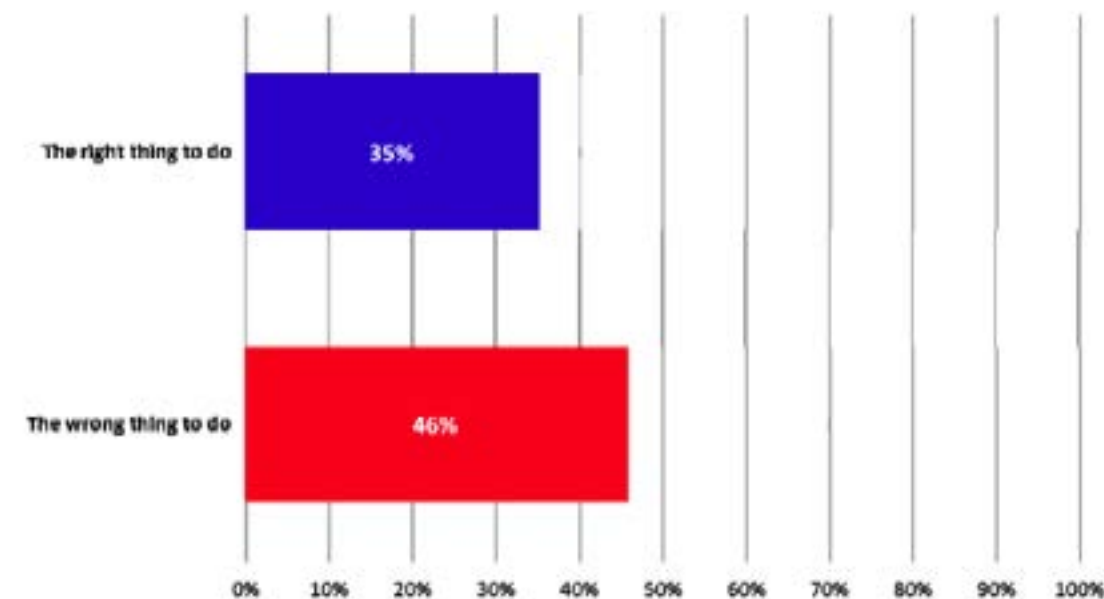


Figure 5 involves both questions of perceptions of the United States and the Arab Spring. It appears that the reaction of the United States toward the Arab Spring was viewed relatively positively—especially when viewed in the context of Tables 1, 2, and 3. Notably, the United States was viewed as playing a more constructive role than both Britain and Germany.

Figure 6: In retrospect, do you believe that the international intervention in Libya was:



Considering the large role the United States played in the N.A.T.O. action in Libya, the negative views of that action are important for future policy considerations of U.S. foreign policy if ‘winning the hearts and minds’ of the Arab people is still a goal of U.S. public diplomacy. Despite the disagreement over N.A.T.O.’s intervention on behalf of rebels in Libya, the respondents overwhelmingly support rebels throughout the Arab world. Specifically, those polled sympathize with rebels in Syria (86 percent to 9 percent for the government), Yemen (89 percent to 5 percent for the government), and Bahrain (64 percent to 24 percent for the government). A full 55 percent said they felt more optimistic than before about the future of the Arab world, whereas 23 percent feel no change and only 16 percent are more pessimistic.

## Discussion

In attempting to find support for the hypothesis that an Obama Effect, as defined above, can be found in Arab public opinion, extensive data have been presented. While these data at times investigate the reasoning behind both sentiments toward the U.S. president and the state generally, specific questions needed for this type of investigation are lacking. The often pre-supposed Anti-Americanism itself seems to lack backing; the data indicates less that the Arabs surveyed hate America and more that they feel measurable fear and contempt for the United States' foreign policy. More specifically, those polled viewed U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East as solely self-interested and revolving around power-politics. These views have not changed in any significant way since Obama has taken office. U.S. intervention in Arab states in particular goes back decades. In the Middle East where memories are not easily forgotten, it is no doubt that many of these interventions are fresh in the minds of many Arabs. This, too, has not changed in any significant way under the Obama Administration, as the United States was party to N.A.T.O.'s intervention in Libya in 2011.

The present view of respondents toward Obama is in stark contrast to Arab views of Obama upon, before, and immediately after his assuming the presidency. During that time Obama saw his highest favorability ratings in the region—but by late 2009 he saw his lowest. As of the latest available data, Obama's approval among Arabs appears to be resting at a moderate level with respect to his full range of variance to date. This "Obama Bounce," as Forsberg calls it, appears to be the result of rather high expectations, which have been perceived as unfulfilled.<sup>27</sup> But is this Obama Bounce equivalent to the oft-cited Obama Effect? No—Forsberg's Obama Bounce is limited to views of the U.S. president and does not presume to reflect views of the United States generally. This leads to the hypothesis with which we began: The reputation of Obama among Arabs has led to the improvement of U.S. reputation among Arabs in an observable way.

There are several problems with supporting this hypothesis. First, the data presented only touches upon the end of one U.S. presidential administration and the beginning of the next. In the short list of scholarly literature investigating such a possible effect, no research presents data showing the beginning of the Bush Administration, or any other administration for that matter. Forsberg's Bounce could be a natural product of excitement for change in U.S. foreign policy, both globally and in the Arab world. Specifically in the Arab world, it is clear that those surveyed are generally skeptical of a president being able to wholly change the foreign policy of the United States alone—perhaps a realization of the political interests involved in the U.S. political system. Thus, despite what the data could tell us from 2004-2011, there exists no way of knowing such a phenomenon could be isolated to Obama.

Second, the Obama Effect has no theoretical basis. Theories are about reasoned abstractions which have falsifiable assumptions. The literature review of this article presents possible foundations upon which such a theory may rest. However, at present, no scholar has gathered these pieces to create a coherent, cognizable theory which describes the assumed linkages both implicit and explicit in the Obama Effect. Thus, the commentators who use the term Obama Effect have not presented a theory found in scholarly literature, nor quantitative evidence to test related assumptions. Hayden himself offers no quantitative data to relate the anecdotal evidence of Obama's popularity he discusses at length, nor any quantitative increase in international public opinion toward the United States.<sup>28</sup> Even if a correlation was found, evidence of causation—controlling for the multitude of other variables which can shape public opinion around the world—would still be lacking.

Bromley has begun to investigate possible reasons for reputational links between an organization and its members, and Davies and Mian have found a correlation between reputations of party leaders and parties. However, the former needs more quantitative support and the latter lacks causal findings. Indeed, in order to convincingly establish the implicit connection in the Obama Effect one must possess a theoretical and causal connection between a head of state's reputation and that of his/her respective state. If international publics began favoring the United States and the U.S. president at roughly the same point in time, how could one be sure there was no third underlying factor that was influencing both? Need they necessarily be related? If there was such a connection, would the resultant change in the state's reputation necessarily lag behind the individual's ascendancy to head of

state? Of

<sup>27</sup> Forsberg, "Criticism towards the United States," 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Hayden, "Beyond the 'Obama effect'" (2011): 784-802.

<sup>29</sup> Bromley, "Relationships between personal and corporate reputation."

<sup>30</sup> Davies and Mian, "Reputation of the party leader."

course such a proposition as the Obama Effect is potentially important for states. However, with respect to states, no article can be found which satisfactorily establishes the theoretical underpinnings required. No such theory appears to exist in public opinion or public relations literature.

While this does provide an opportunity to create a theory herein, such an opportunity will not be taken. This is due to our last problem with the presented hypothesis: the data simply do not support such a conclusion. While this article deals specifically with the Arab world and the other articles cited do not, if a theoretical connection were to exist it would be broad enough to apply to the present study. Nonetheless, the present article is only searching for support for the Obama Effect in the Arab world. While the data above show flashes of hope for the Obama Effect (Table 5), the totality of the data presents, at best, a mixed picture of evidence of the Obama Effect and at worst no evidence upon which to determine a causal link. From 2005 to 2011, there was no change in the percent of respondents who preferred the United States as the world's lone superpower over any other state; about 8 percent (Table 1). The same period began and ended with 10 percent of respondents picking the United States as the foreign state in which they would live, with changes in the middle of 5 percent (Table 2). Tables 8 and 9, and Figure 3 also show remarkable stability in the views toward the United States. Figure 4 appears to almost contradict the Obama Effect. Thus, the evidence presented in this paper is not sufficient to support the Obama Effect.

Regarding the potential importance of the findings for the upcoming U.S. presidential election and subsequent U.S. foreign policy changes, data from an Arab Public Opinion Poll question, which asked about the 2008 presidential election, suggested that a majority of Arabs either do not pay attention to U.S. presidential races or feel that U.S. policy will remain the same regardless of who wins the election. Due to the current foreign policy goals of the United States, Arab public opinion will be important when crafting foreign policy for whoever stands at the podium on Inauguration Day in January 2013. While foreign publics do not vote domestically, they do vote in their own elections and in other ways effect the policies of their countries. As the Arab world clamors for—and slowly achieves—democracy, the views of average Arabs will have impacts on the actions and policies of their own leaders. "Foreign leaders, it seems, do pay attention to the attitudes of their own publics when they weigh decisions—such as whether to send troops into harm's way—which might incur significant public concern or opposition."<sup>31</sup> Of course, the fastest way the United States could improve this view would be to work toward peace between Israel and Palestine—but this is nothing new for U.S. presidents. Indeed, "[p]ublic opinion about U.S. foreign policy... appears to matter when countries make decisions on issues of importance to the United States. The estimated effect of public opinion about foreign policy is particularly large and robust if a specific foreign policy issue is salient for foreign publics."<sup>32</sup> Thus, if the next president wishes cooperation from Arab leaders he or she must remain mindful of Arab public opinion.

After the Arab Spring, it seems clear that Arabs feel a connection with protestors and government opposition throughout the region. They feel that their governments should concentrate on making decisions on behalf of their own citizens and not others of the same identity. At the same time, they still feel that the United States should not engage in military intervention. Based on the favorable views of Turkey's actions following the Arab Spring, Arabs would likely rather see the United States more quickly call for democratic reforms in other countries throughout the region.

### *Suggestions for further research*

No theoretical or causal link between the reputation of Obama and the reputation of the United States among Arab publics was found through this study. However, the understanding of the relationship between the reputation of a head of state and the reputation of the state could be vitally useful for public diplomacy efforts the world over. Indeed, such a theory would likely be similarly applicable to companies and their CEO or other organizations with prominent leaders. Further research on this topic is suggested—including longitudinal data that ask consistent questions about a head of state and the state itself. Moreover, questions aimed at reasons for views and possible causal links between the state and the individual should be asked.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Goldsmith, and Yusaku Horiuchi, "In search of soft power: does foreign public opinion matter for U.S. foreign policy?" World Politics, 2012, accessed June 14, 2012. [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1932478](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1932478): 38.

<sup>32</sup> Goldsmith and Horiuchi, "In search of soft power," 2012: 37.



## CONCLUSION

This paper analyzed extensive public opinion data from the Arab world. While the inability to ask questions specifically for this project is certainly a limitation of the research, the questions which were asked are viewed as sufficient to be able to find support for the hypothesis presented herein. However, evidence could not be found for an Obama Effect in the Arab world, defined as the improvement of U.S. reputation among Arabs due to the reputation of Barack Obama among Arabs. Nonetheless, for the United States Arab public opinion will continue to become more important in order to gain the cooperation of Arab governments in pursuing U.S. foreign policy goals. If U.S. foreign policy toward the Arab region is considered to be important, it will be imperative for the next president to have an 'ear to the ground' of Arab public opinion when engaging with that region. Arab respondents generally are skeptical of the ability of the U.S. president to effectively change U.S. foreign policy in the region, and seek a real ally in the pursuit of democratization, without the blunt force used by past—and present—administrations. Research into possible links between international views of the U.S. president and international views of the United States generally is suggested, as it has the potential to yield important results for public diplomacy efforts around the world.

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