

FACTORS AFFECTING THE U.S. INTERNATIONAL IMAGE: THE POTENTIAL FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE SHORT- AND LONG-TERM

By Frank Louis Rusciano
Rider University

Abstract

This paper studies short-term and long-term factors that affected the image of the United States between the years 2000 and 2010. It begins by showing how the election of George W. Bush, the Iraq War, and the election of Barack Obama affected the United States' image in several nations. It then uses data from the Pew 2004 Global Survey to examine longer-term factors that influenced the U.S.'s international image. Using individual- and national-level regression analyses, it discovers several factors that predict how positive ratings of the United States were on an international level. The paper then discusses how the 2012 Presidential election results might affect the nation's global image. It concludes that the election may have some effect, but that the underlying longer-term characteristics that influence attitudes towards the United States are unlikely to change much.

Key Words

USA, Obama, Obama Effect, elections, nation branding, public opinion, soft power, reputation management, foreign policy, image culture

Introduction

One-time and perennial events may affect a nation's international image. However, there are other factors that may affect a nation's image in the longer-term; these include characteristics more generally associated with the country and less likely to be altered by one-time events or leadership changes. Such factors also help determine a nation's potential for public diplomacy. This paper begins by showing how the election of George W. Bush, the Iraq War, and the election of Barack Obama affected the United States' image in several nations. It then uses data from the 2004 Pew Global Attitudes Project to examine longer-term factors that influenced the United States' international image. Using individual- and national-level analyses, it discovers several factors that predict how positive ratings of the United States were on an international level. The paper then discusses how the 2012 presidential election results might affect the nation's global image, and therefore, its capacity for public diplomacy in light of these short- and long-term factors. It concludes that the election may have some effect, but that the underlying longer-term characteristics that influence attitudes toward the United States are unlikely to change easily or rapidly.

Events of the past decade have underscored the importance of world opinion regarding nations' international reputations. In particular, foreign policy analysts, citizens, and policy makers have become increasingly aware that a nation's international image is an important factor in determining how effective it might be in pursuing global endeavors. In the specific case of the United States, Robert Wright notes how "several forces have converged to create a new truth: national security depends crucially on foreign feelings toward the United States."¹ Joseph Nye accordingly notes that:

Public diplomacy is an instrument that governments use to mobilize these resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries, rather than merely their governments. ... But if the content of a country's culture, values, and policies are not attractive, public diplomacy that "broadcasts" them cannot produce such power.²

Concerns about the link between public diplomacy and "soft power" have prompted an upsurge in scholarship analyzing the United States' image in the world, notably in books by Sweig,³ Kohut and Stokes,⁴ and Rusciano.⁵

This paper attempts to take a different approach to the issue of Fremdbild, or the manner in which other countries perceive this nation. It begins by tracing the percentages of positive views of the United States using survey results from 2000 through 2010; variations in these measures are short term and explained by changes in leadership. Underlying these short-term trends, however, are long-term factors that go into the construction of the United States' image in other countries. To illustrate this point, the study uses the Pew Global Attitude surveys of 44 different nations from 2004 to trace the deeper components of the United States' international image. The study examines three factors that reflect how other nations view the United States: (1) their opinions on American culture in terms of music and film, business practices, and political ideals; (2) their general opinions about whether they "like" Americans; and (3) their general opinions about whether they "like" the United States as a nation. It then generates other factors that predict these views, including general attitudes toward military hegemony, the spread of American culture abroad, globalization, the spreading of global culture, and work conditions in each nation. The study discovers that these measures predict attitudes toward the United States with a significant degree of accuracy. As such, one must consider these longer-term factors when attempting to understand or improve the nation's standing in the world, and in turn, in the practice of public diplomacy.

Deconstructing the United States' International Image: Short-Term Effects of Leadership

There has been considerable speculation about the factors that affect the United States' image in the world in recent years, in part because of variations in positive evaluations in global surveys of individual countries between 2000 and 2010. Figure 1 shows the percentage of positive opinions in various nations during this period. In each case, the results have a "U" shape, beginning relatively high in 2000, decreasing between 2001 and 2008, then recovering and moving generally higher in 2009 and 2010. These effects were primarily due to the change in the presidency from George W. Bush to Barack Obama:

In most countries, especially the wealthier nations, President Barack Obama gets an enthusiastic thumbs up for the way he has handled the world economic crisis. ... This pattern is indicative of the broader picture of global opinion in 2010. President Barack Obama remains popular in most parts of the world. ... In turn, opinions of the U.S., which improved markedly in 2009 in response to Obama's new presidency, also have remained far more positive than they were for much of George W. Bush's tenure.⁶

¹ Robert, Wright. "They Hate us, They Really Hate Us," New York Times Book Review. May 14, 2006.

² Joseph Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. (March 2008): 94.

³ Julia E. Sweig, *Friendly Fire: Losing Friends and Making Enemies in the Anti-American Century* (Washington: A Council on Foreign Affairs Book, 2006).

⁴ Andrew Kohut and Bruce Stokes, *America Against the World: How We Are Different and Why We Are Disliked* (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt and Company, 2006).

⁵ Frank Louis Rusciano, *Global Rage after the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

⁶ Pew Global Attitudes, "Obama More Popular Abroad Than at Home, Global Image of U.S. Continues to Benefit" June 17, 2010.

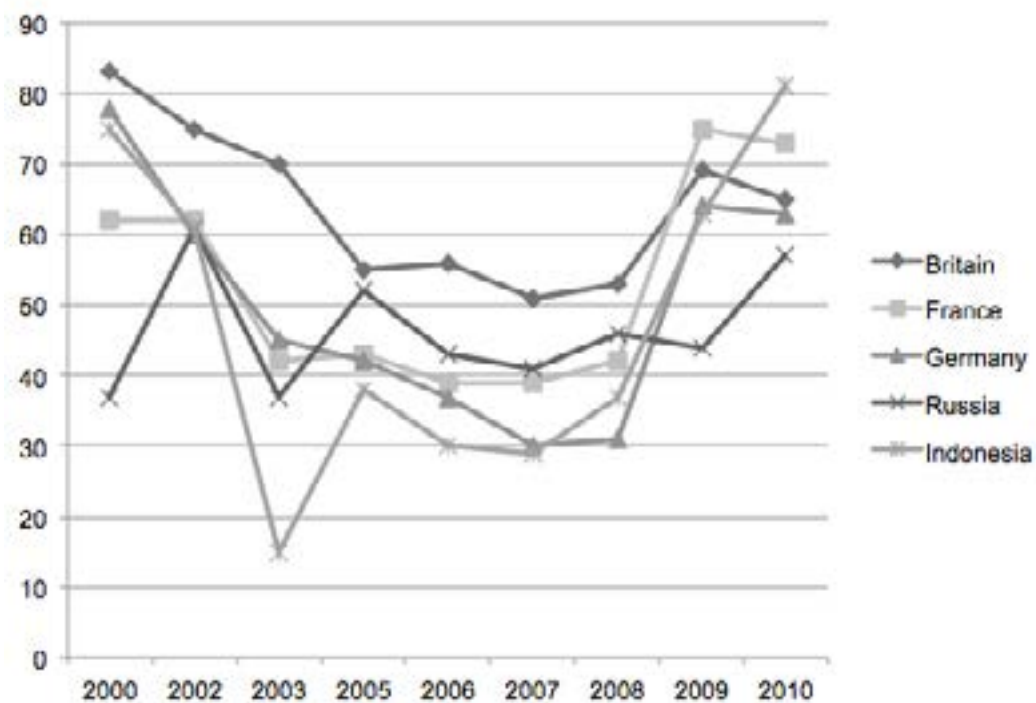


Figure 1: Positive evaluations of the United States, by nation, 2000-2010

These findings suggest that a change in leadership can affect a nation's global image. This is not merely due to a leader's "likeability." In Bush's case, the administration's policies on the Iraq War and torture, along with a tendency for unilateral action, affected evaluations of the president and the country. However, Obama's appeal goes beyond satisfaction with his actions as president. Indeed, "a generally positive view of him and the [United States] coexists with significant concerns about the American approach to world affairs and some key policies ... during President Bush's terms in office ... specific criticism ran hand-in-hand with anti-American and anti-Bush sentiment." These findings suggest that a president's personal characteristics, as well as his policies, affect the United States' image, and therefore its capacity for public diplomacy.

Aside from such specific factors, there are more general characteristics that also affect the nation's image. These characteristics are more generic in that they do not apply specifically to one leader or another, even though they might be affected by a leader's actions. As such, they constitute longer-term factors in the construction and judgment of the United States' international image.

Deconstructing the United States' International Image: Longer-Term Effects of General Factors

Most analyses of the United States' global image blame negative ratings on particular policies like the American intervention in Iraq, contrary to the United Nations' disapproval, or on more general factors such as resentment toward U.S. military, political, and cultural hegemony in the world. This paper takes a baseline approach to developing a general model of global attitudes that combine to create the United States' image.

This portion of the study uses data from the 2004 Pew Global Attitudes Project and includes information from forty-four countries, of which thirty-nine had sufficient information for analysis. It begins with a factor analysis of

of the following questions regarding how citizens of these nations viewed the United States over a variety of measures:

- Would the world be safer if there was another country with a stronger military than the United States?
- Is it a bad or a good thing that U.S. customs are exported here?
- Do you like or dislike American views of democracy?
- Do you like or dislike the American way of doing business?
- Do you like or dislike American movies, music, and television?
- Do you admire U.S. technology?
- Do you favor or oppose the United States' fight against terrorism?
- Does the United States do enough to lessen the gap between rich and poor nations?
- Does the United States do too much or too little to solve world problems?
- What is your opinion of the United States?
- What is your opinion of Americans?
- How much do you think the United States considers other nations in making global decisions?

The analysis yielded the three significant factors shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Factors and Loadings for U.S. Image

Name	Questions	Factor Loading
<i>Affinity Factor</i>	Opinion of U. S.	.802
	Opinion of Americans	.778
	How much U.S considers other countries in global decisions	.612
<i>Cultural Factor</i>	U. S. customs good or bad	.540
	Like/Dislike U. S. democracy	.695
	Like/Dislike U. S. business ways	.658
	Like/Dislike U. S. movies, music	.644
	Admire U. S. technology	.576
<i>Military Factor</i>	Would it be safer if another country had a military stronger than the U. S.?	.852

The affinity factor measures general feelings toward the United States and how much the United States considers other countries in making decisions. The cultural factor measures how nations regard American culture in terms of the values of democracy, business, technology, music, movies, television, and general customs. The military factor measures attitudes toward America's military hegemony compared to other nations in the world. From these factors, three additive scales were created by the addition of positive responses to the questions. The culture and affinity variables were positively correlated ($r=.503$, $p=.000$), while neither variable was significantly correlated with the military variable ($r=.070$, $p=.000$ and $r=.050$, $p=.000$, respectively).

5 Pew Global Attitudes, "Obama More Popular Abroad Than at Home, Global Image of U.S. Continues to Benefit" June 17, 2010.

6 Pew Global Attitudes, "Obama More Popular Abroad Than at Home, Global Image of U.S. Continues to Benefit" June 17, 2010.

7 See, for instance, Michael Shifter's comments on Latin American attitudes toward the U. S. in Michael Shifter, "Tracing the Roots of Anti-Americanism in Latin America." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, (Summer/Fall 2004): 107-112.

8 The nations used for the study included Angola, Argentina, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, the Ivory Coast, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kenya, South Korea, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Senegal, the Slovak Republic, South Africa, Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda, Great Britain, Uzbekistan,

9 Venezuela, Lebanon, and Jordan. Certain nations included in the Pew Study, such as Egypt, were not included in this analysis due to a lack of data on some questions; in addition, these questions were, of course, not asked in the United States, so it too was excluded.

These results suggest that reactions to the United States combine perceptions of its position in the world and its attitudes toward other countries, but not evaluations of its military hegemony. The more positively other nations view these cultural aspects of the United States, the more positively they tend to view the United States. However, given the attention directed toward the United States' use of unilateral military power during the Bush administration, the military variable has little impact on the way the United States is perceived internationally. Further, military hegemony is not related to cultural values about American customs, media, technology, or business practices. Further analysis suggests that these norms are important in part because the nation has come to symbolize the whole process of globalization.

Connections, Culture, and Labor: The United States as a Symbol of Globalization

Some analysts have argued that declines in the United States' image are due mainly to a form of resentment toward its overarching influence in the world. By this argument, one could find similar complaints against Britain in the nineteenth century when it ruled an empire; hegemony, like familiarity, breeds contempt, or at least envy, even among allies. Indeed, Charles Krauthammer goes so far as to argue that the only reason the United States received an outpouring of support from around the world after the attacks of 9/11 was because the nation was wounded; after the United States responded militarily, he states, the sympathy vanished.

These arguments are at best incomplete. The United States has enjoyed hegemonic status in the world since the collapse of the Soviet Union nearly two decades ago; evaluations of the United States have varied significantly during that period. A study of world opinion in eleven international newspapers for three months after 9/11 illustrated these variations in the global media. Descriptions of world opinion began positively right after the attacks, declined after the military invasion of Afghanistan, then became positive again after the United States presented convincing evidence that the attack originated from Osama bin Laden and his training bases in Afghanistan. Finally, the preceding analysis indicates that military hegemony is not a significant factor in the general evaluation of the United States globally.

Instead, factors related to the general effects of globalization contribute to the construction of the nation's image. The following questions were factor-analyzed to discover potential characteristics that correlated with affinity, cultural, and military evaluations of the United States:

- Do you think growing trade and business ties between [your] country and other countries ... is a very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, or very bad thing for [your] country?
- What do you think about the faster communication and greater travel between the people of [your] country and people of other countries—do you think it is a very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, or very bad thing for [your] country?
- How do you feel about the world becoming more connected through greater economic trade and faster communication—do you think it is a very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, or very bad thing for [your] country?
- What do you think about growing trade and business ties between [your] country and other countries—do you think it is a very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, or very bad thing for you and your family?
- What do you think about the way movies, TV, and music from different parts of the world are available in [your] country—do you think it is a very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, or very bad thing for [your] country?
- Do you think having the opportunity to watch movies and TV and listen to music from different parts of the world is very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, or very bad for you and your family?

- Has each of the following gotten better or worse over the last five years in your country: the availability of good paying jobs?
- Has each of the following gotten better or worse over the last five years in your country: the working conditions for ordinary workers?

These questions divided into three factors entitled globalization, global culture, and work, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Factors and Loadings for Globalization and Work

Name	Questions	Factor Loading
Globalization	Global trade good for country?	.799
	Global communication good for country?	.767
	Global connections good for country?	.707
	Global trade good for family?	.679
Global Culture	Movies, TV, music from different countries good for country?	.865
	Movies, TV, music from different countries good for country?	.864
Work	Availability of jobs better in last five years?	.852
	Better working conditions in last five years?	.856

The factors were used to create three variables that combined additive scales from the designated questions. The globalization variable included responses from the benefits of global trade, global communication and travel, and global connections for the citizen's country, along with the benefits of global trade for the citizen's family. The global culture variable included responses regarding the benefits of access to global music, television, and movies on the citizen's country and on his or her family. The work variable included responses on whether respondents felt the availability of jobs and working conditions had improved in the past five years in their country. All three variables were constructed so that a higher value indicated a more positive response on the questions. The variables were also inter-correlated (globalization and global culture with $r=.386$, $p=.000$; globalization and work with $r=.142$, $p=.000$; and global culture and work with $r=.107$, $p=.000$), as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlations between Image and Globalization and Work Scales

	<i>Culture</i>	<i>Affinity</i>	<i>Military</i>
<i>Globalization</i>	.216 (.000)	.214 (.000)	.061 (.000)
<i>Global Culture</i>	.360 (.000)	.258 (.000)	.045 (.000)
<i>Work</i>	.100 (.000)	.141 (.000)	.018 (.000)

The combined variables measure the extent to which citizens view the general effects of globalization in terms of trade, culture, and the quality and availability of jobs. When these variables are correlated with the variables measuring the United States' image in the world, the results indicate a relationship among the feelings toward cultural hegemony and a general affinity toward the United States. However, there are no relationships among these variables and the question about military hegemony.

The results suggest that attitudes toward globalization in general, whether in terms of business and trade ties or cultural ties, have a significant relationship with attitudes on whether other nations' citizens are positively inclined toward the United States. Other citizens' feelings about their work situation also relates to these evaluative measures of the United States, albeit at a lower level. Again, the question of military hegemony does not relate to any of the questions about globalization.

These findings suggest two likely dynamics occurring in the generation of the United States' image in the world. The first appears to equate globalization with feelings toward American culture and the people and nation itself; it is as if the United States has become the symbol of globalization to other nations' citizens—if they view globalization positively, they view the United States positively. Julie Sweig notes:

In the 1990s, our government, private sector and opinion makers sold globalization as virtually synonymous with Americanization ... open markets, open societies, and smaller government would be the bridge to the twenty-first century. So where globalization hasn't delivered, the [United States] is blamed.

One can see this judgment reflected in the link between attitudes toward globalization, global culture, and work, and feelings toward America and the content of its culture. The second dynamic involves American military hegemony, and here the measure seems independent of attitudes toward globalization. Responses on this question might rest upon the actions the United States takes in the world, especially during 2004, a year after the United States took unilateral action in invading Iraq, an action generally condemned by most nations.

Creating a Model of World Opinion Toward the United States

When one wishes to evaluate "world opinion" toward any subject using global polls, the common practice is to examine the marginal frequencies from each nation's sample and make a generalization about the results. As such, this paper initially examined the percentages of positive evaluations of the United States in different nations, and then attempted to describe a general pattern about how "world opinion" regards the United States over time.

This study follows this method by replicating the previous analyses, using each of the individual countries in the sample as a separate case, and by calculating mean values for each country for the culture, military, globalization, global culture, work, and affinity variables. The results were weighed according to the sample size for each country for the analysis. Each of the factors in the model was then correlated with one another. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlations among Mean Weighted Values of Factors from Individual Nations

	<i>Global</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>Culture</i>	<i>Military</i>	<i>Affinity</i>
<i>Globalization</i>	.139 .000	.325 .000	.327 .000	.353 .000	.284 .000
<i>Global Culture</i>		-.001 .000	.684 .000	.087 .000	.536 .000
<i>Work</i>			.144 .000	.173 .000	.254 .000
<i>Culture</i>				.092 .000	.855 .000
<i>Military</i>					.062 .000

First, all the measures are correlated with the affinity measure of attitudes toward the United States except the military hegemony scale; this finding is consistent with earlier results and underscores the relative lack of direct effects from attitudes toward American military power in evaluations of the country. The strongest correlation is between attitudes toward American culture and attitudes toward the United States; not surprisingly, the second highest effect is from reactions to entertainment imported from other nations generally. These common effects, along with the strong inter-correlation between these two measures ($r=.683$, $p=.000$), illustrates that reactions to American culture and reactions to the importation of any foreign cultural influences into other nations is linked. As such, the global dissemination of entertainment is associated in other nations with the dissemination of specific American values. Similarly, the relationship between attitudes toward globalization in general and attitudes toward both American culture ($r=.327$, $p=.000$) and U.S. military hegemony ($r=.353$, $p=.000$) suggest that the process of globalization is in part associated with both American values and military power. Taken together, these findings

suggest that the dissemination of values that occurs due to globalization is largely seen as a proxy for the spread of American values. Whether such an equivalency is justified is irrelevant; what matters is that nations partially evaluate their feelings toward the United States according to this metric.

The predictive power of these measures is shown below in the results of a stepwise regression analysis that uses mean measures as independent variables and the mean affinity toward the United States as a dependent variable:

.84 mean culture + -.162 mean military + -.051 mean globalization + -.117 mean global culture + .352 mean work-12.22 (constant) = mean affinity R=.868, R2= .753.

Reactions to American culture had the strongest effect upon opinions of the United States: The higher the evaluation of the nation's customs, business practices, and entertainment, the higher the evaluations of the nation. However, the cultural variable's strong effect upon affinity is explained in part by the strong correlations between this measure and the global culture and globalization variables. Finally, in the regression equation, the military value does have a negative effect upon the affinity measure, suggesting that when the model controls for the other variables, attitudes toward U.S. military hegemony have a negative effect on the nation's image. The R2 value indicates that approximately 75% of the variance in mean evaluations of the United States is explained by these four factors. Because these factors are unlikely to change in the short term, any speculations about the United States' capabilities for public diplomacy must be based upon these general factors, along with short-term results like presidential elections.

Conclusion: Globalization, American Values, and Public Diplomacy

This analysis began by noting the effect presidential elections have on the United States' global image. Obama's election improved ratings of the United States, both due to changes in policy and attitude, as well as the new president's personal popularity in various nations. As one looks forward to the 2012 election, there is a palpable preference in many countries for Obama to win a second term; whether this desire is motivated by the president's likeability, the memories of the Bush administration policies, or a combination of both, is difficult to say. Due to unclear policies, it is also unclear how Mitt Romney's presidency would affect America's global image, if he were to win the upcoming elections. One might expect an initial decline due to disappointment with an Obama loss, followed by a "wait-and-see" perspective that scrutinizes the direction of a Romney presidency. Presidential election results matter in the short term, as shown in the survey results in Figure 1—and such changes, in turn, affect a president's capabilities to practice public diplomacy to advance the nation's policies and values.

The detailed data analysis indicates that attitudes toward American customs, values, business practices, and culture are critical factors in determining how other nations regard the United States in the longer term. These factors are often perceived as the equivalent of globalization and the changes it renders. Perhaps in the longer term, the effects of globalization will be traced to other nations as well, with a resulting change in the equation of globalization with Americanization. In this sense, strategies might exist to alter the longer-term factors affecting the United States' image. American leaders might have the capacity (and interest) in severing the perceived linkage between American cultural norms and globalization, especially given that this relationship has a tenuous basis in fact. Because globalization is often viewed as an intrusion into the cultural traditions of some countries, it might serve the United States well to disengage these two concepts in rhetoric and policy.

One must return to Joseph Nye's observation about public diplomacy: If a nation's values, customs, and policies are acceptable, its potential for public diplomacy is enhanced. This analysis indicates that these factors matter due to their overall effect on a nation's image. It is here that a paradox arises with attempts to change the United States' (or any nation's) image in the name of enhancing public diplomacy. On the one hand, changes in the values one advocates or the policies a nation pursues may alter a nation's image. On the other hand, decision makers embrace public diplomacy in large part to disseminate a nation's values and advance its policy agenda. One cannot abandon those values or goals without defeating the very purpose of public diplomacy from the nation's point of view. Given the free flow of information in a globalized environment, this paradox is likely a problem that any hegemon must accept and account for in an age of globalization.

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