

U.S. Standing in the World: Causes, Consequences, and the Future

PUBLIC REPORT
*of the Task Force on U.S.
Standing in World Affairs*



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AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

*Please see the long version of this report on the APSA Website for references.
<http://www.apsanet.org/USstanding>

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The opinions expressed in this report are solely those of the Task Force members who approved it. No opinions, statements of fact, or conclusions in the report should be attributed to those named above, the American Political Science Association, the Miller Center, or Cornell University.

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U.S. REPUTATION DARKER SINCE SEPT 11

United Press International, September 11, 2003

U.S. STANDING WITH ARABS HITS A LOW

Christian Science Monitor, September 2, 2004

**TROUBLED U.S. STANDING STARTING TO
AFFECT BUSINESS OVERSEAS**

Seattle Times, July 4, 2004

EVEN AMONG ALLIES, IMAGE OF U.S. DROPS

Washington Post, June 28, 2007

**NEGATIVE VIEWS OF U.S. PERSIST, DESPITE
FAITH IN OBAMA**

Inter Press Service, July 7, 2009

U.S. standing—its position with respect to reputation, stature, or prestige in world affairs—declined dramatically in the past decade. What’s more, many American leaders and citizens worry that this decline, despite a recent upturn, may be part of a long-term trend—one that will be hard to reverse.

In a summer 2008 poll, more Americans ranked “improving American standing in the world” as “very important” (versus “somewhat” or “not” important) than any other foreign policy goal listed, including “protecting the jobs of American workers” and “preventing the spread of nuclear weapons” (See Figure 1)—and that was before the current economic crisis unleashed a new torrent of international criticism of the United States.

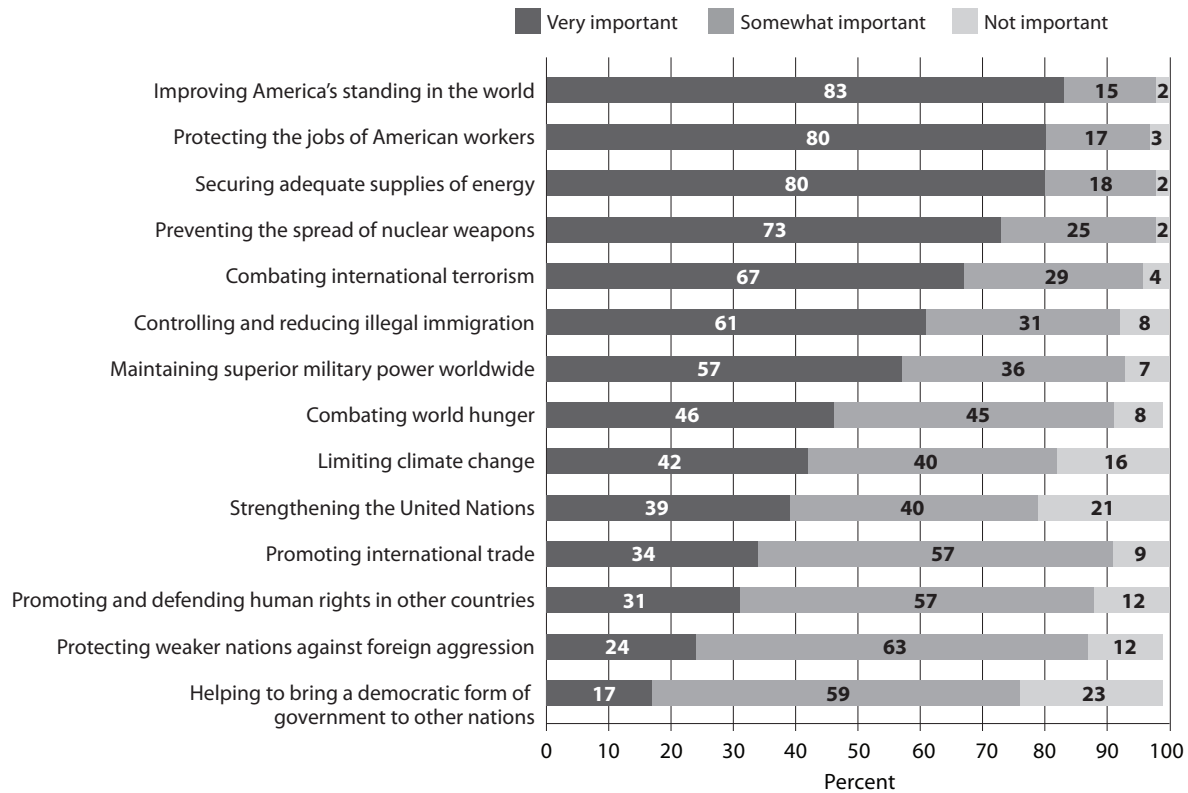
Not surprisingly, perhaps, one of President Obama’s central foreign policy objectives has been to “restore American standing.” To date, Obama appears to enjoy broad confidence around the globe. Favorable foreign attitudes towards the United States have risen sharply. At the same time there are strong indications of continuing, deep global dissatisfaction with U.S. economic and military policies. This suggests that U.S. standing remains a significant political issue. The disjuncture between confidence in Obama and discontent with U.S. policies is a potentially troubling fault line for the United States and the Obama presidency.

The decline in U.S. standing both reflects and reinforces weakened U.S. diplomacy and domestic troubles. But is this true? What causes standing to rise or fall, and what happens when it does? Would a better understanding of standing help the United States to drive or manage those consequences, good or bad? If so, what can be done to better protect and enhance America’s standing, and improve the country’s image for the future?

Those are the questions the American Political Science Association Task Force sought to explore and to answer.

Figure 1: U.S. Foreign Policy Goals

Percentage who think the following should be very, somewhat, or not important foreign policy goals of the United States.



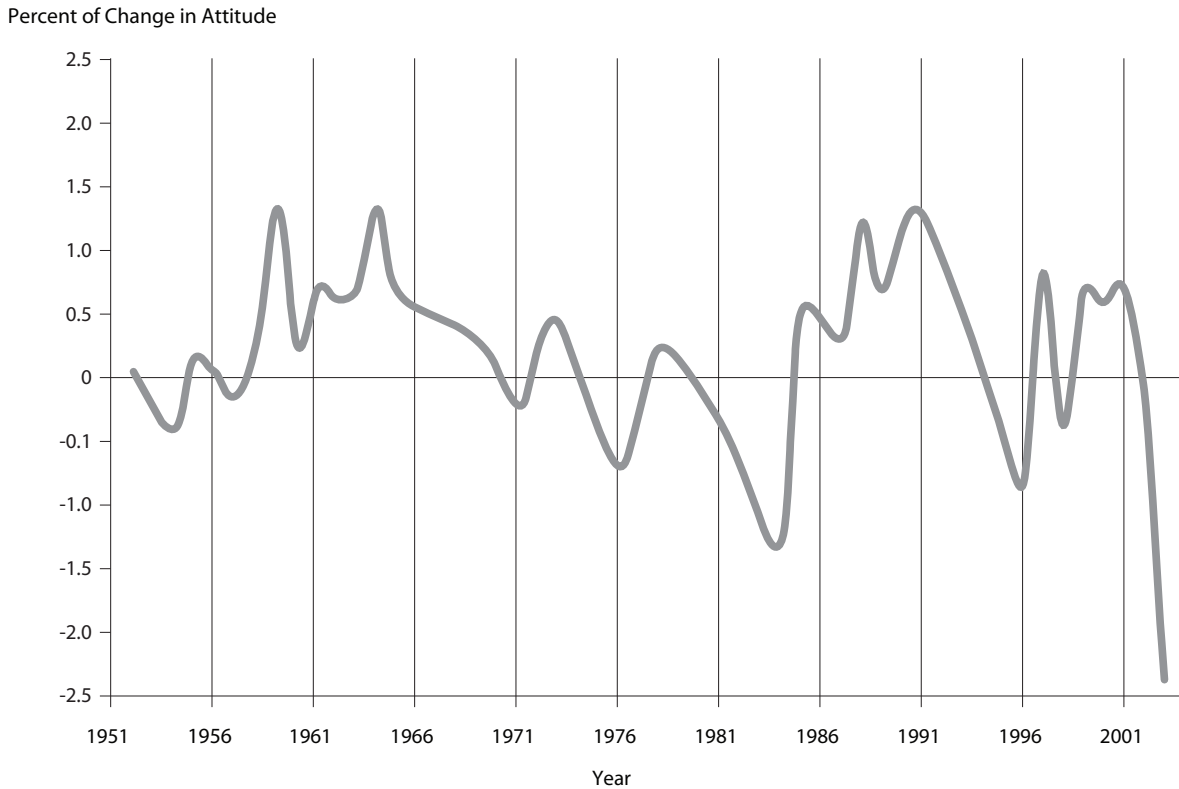
Source: Chicago Council Report on "Troubled by Loss of Standing in the World, Americans Support Major Foreign Policy Changes", September 2008. http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/POS_Topline%20Reports/POS%202008/2008%20Public%20Opinion_Foreign%20Policy.pdf (accessed July 24, 2009).

We believe that “standing” is significant for both scholarship and policy. Scholars recognize that even as a country’s military and economic power remain constant, its standing can affect its relative influence in world politics. Although political scientists rarely use the word “standing,” they have invoked terms such as prestige, reputation, credibility, moral stature, authority, and legitimacy to capture this effect. We focus on standing because it has become the term of art in contemporary public discussions, and U.S. officials have used related terms since at least the Second World War.

In the policy world, many leaders also recognize that standing matters; as Colin Powell once argued, “diplomacy uses the reputation of power to achieve what power itself often cannot achieve, or can achieve only at greater and sometimes excessive cost.” And this is not the first time the United States has experienced a decline in standing: America’s standing plummeted in the 1970s, during and after the Viet Nam war; and in the early 1980s, during the Euromissile controversy (See Figure 2).

Of course, preserving standing is not the only concern of U.S. leaders and citizens; other aims that damage standing may at times deserve priority. But our hope is that, by helping

Figure 2: Trend in Net European Attitudes toward the United States
(normalized average, yearly base).



Sources: USIA XX series 1952-67, Eurobarometer series 1970-200, Pew Global Attitudes survey 2002, and Transatlantic Trend Survey 2002-4 as compiled and charted by Pierangelo Isernia, "Anti-Americanism in Europe during the Cold War," in Peter J. Katzenstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds. *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 78.

to shed light on how standing is bestowed and why it matters, we can aid in understanding, restoring, safeguarding, and bolstering standing going forward.

I. Standing and its Relevance

Unlike something a nation possesses and can easily measure, like wealth or military might, standing is an attribute assigned to the United States by actors beyond its borders—such as foreign leaders and peoples, international organizations, and transnational groups—and assessed by citizens within them. U.S. standing has both an absolute and a relative quality. It is absolute in the sense that it can be high or low and can vary over time. It is relative in that U.S. standing could be better or worse than that of other countries or actors, such as China or the European Union.

Standing has two major facets: credibility and esteem. Credibility refers to the U.S. government's ability to do what it says it is going to do—to "stand up" for what it believes, and to "stand against" threats to its interests and ideals. Esteem refers to America's stature, or what America is perceived to "stand for" in the hearts and minds of foreign publics and

policymakers. Credibility and esteem can be mutually reinforcing, but they can also be difficult to pursue in tandem—a trade-off implied by Machiavelli’s famous dictum: “it is much safer to be feared than loved.”

Standing is densely interwoven with U.S. “hard power”—the nation’s material military and economic capabilities. U.S. capabilities help the nation realize its interests, and a modern military and robust economy breed appeal and respect. Power and standing, however, are not the same thing. U.S. standing may vary even if U.S. hard power does not, as we have seen since 2000: standing has declined (see Figure 3), but relative American power has been steady (see Figure 5 below).. Likewise with “soft power”: a country’s standing can rise and fall even as the attractiveness of its system remains relatively constant. And unlike pro- or anti-Americanism,

Standing is not about whether others are for or against the United States, but instead whether they view the United States as a credible actor with traits that should be admired or emulated.

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Why should policymakers—or political scientists—care about standing at all?

First, recent history suggests that standing can play a fundamental role in the shaping of strategy. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush initiated a new national strategy for the United States that favored the credibility dimension of standing—emphasizing a policy package of assertive unilateralism, preventive use of force, and aggressive democratization. The administration achieved some initial successes, swiftly toppling the Taliban in Afghanistan, securing dismantlement of Libya’s nuclear program, and encouraging an apparent halt or slow-down in Iran’s nuclear program.

Yet, over time, despite the lack of further terrorist attacks on U.S. soil, American standing declined. The Bush administration’s single-minded approach lost significant support at home and abroad, as the United States grew mired in Iraq, was accused of violations of international law, and drew international criticism and resentment—even as Osama bin Laden remained at large. This decline in standing only made it harder for the United States to be effective in foreign affairs—prompting the Bush administration to take what some saw as a reverse course after 2005 and return to the typical pattern of American internationalism since World War II.

More distant history speaks to the significance of standing as well. In the long competition with the Soviet Union, the United States was anxious that its reputation to protect its allies, especially those in Europe, be seen as credible by both Soviet leaders and Europeans. U.S. participation in the Korean and Viet Nam wars was spurred by the fear that a perception of diminished U.S. credibility would lead others to join a rising Communist tide. As Lyndon Johnson explained to Martin Luther King, Jr. in early 1965, “If I pulled out [of Vietnam] ... I think the Germans would be scared to death that our commitment to them was no good, and God knows what we’d have in other places in the world....”

Standing is the everyday currency of America’s existence in the world. Political standing is akin to long-term political capital (or “goodwill” in accounting). It has intrinsic value, including in the self-understanding of Americans, even when it has no readily observable behavioral implications.

Figure 3: U.S. Favorability Rating*

	1999/ 2000	2002	2003	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Figures in Percent								
U.S.	—	—	—	83	76	80	84	88
Canada	71	72	63	59	—	55	—	68
Britain	83	75	70	55	56	51	53	69
France	62	62	42	43	39	39	42	75
Germany	78	60	45	42	37	30	31	64
Spain	50	—	38	41	23	34	33	58
Poland	86	79	—	62	—	61	68	67
Russia	31	61	37	52	43	41	46	44
Turkey	52	30	15	23	12	9	12	14
Egypt	—	—	—	—	30	21	22	27
Jordan	—	25	1	21	15	20	19	25
Lebanon	—	36	27	42	—	47	51	55
Palestinian territories	—	—	*	—	—	13	—	15
Israel	—	—	78	—	—	78	—	71
China	—	—	—	42	47	34	41	47
India	—	66	—	71	56	59	66	76
Indonesia	75	61	15	38	30	29	37	63
Japan	77	72	—	—	63	61	50	59
Pakistan	23	10	13	23	27	15	19	16
South Korea	58	52	46	—	—	58	70	78
Argentina	50	34	—	—	—	16	22	38
Brazil	56	51	35	—	—	44	47	61
Mexico	68	64	—	—	—	56	47	69
Kenya	94	80	—	—	—	87	—	90
Nigeria	46	76	61	—	62	70	64	79

1999/2000 survey trends provided by the Office of Research, U.S. Department of State, Question 11a.

* % Respondents with a favorable opinion of the United States

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Confidence in Obama Lifts U.S. Image Around the World."
Released July 23, 2009 <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=264> (accessed July 23, 2009).

II. Three Audiences of U.S. Standing

U.S. standing can differ depending on the audience. We consider three audiences here: other major countries and regions of the world; non-state international actors such as the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and broader global opinion; and Americans themselves.

Regions

One indicator of U.S. standing is found in polls of foreign opinion. These polls have many limitations, especially in authoritarian countries, but they nonetheless deserve attention.

Global opinion towards the United States has fluctuated since the 1960s and experienced a particularly deep downturn between 2002 and 2007. In the past two years, favorable public attitudes towards the United States have turned sharply upward, especially in 2009.

The recent improvement may reflect the success of the surge in Iraq and an “Obama effect”: the honeymoon period of a new president, his acknowledged rhetorical skills, and what his election signifies about the openness of America.

In policy terms, however, most believe that there has been little change in the U.S. disregard for the interests of their country, and that U.S. influence in the world is still mostly bad. It is likely that the disconnect between high expectations of what the United States should

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do in the years ahead, and what it actually can and will do, will pose a persistent challenge for managing U.S. standing. That task will require particularly close attention to variation in standing across regions.

The decline was uneven across different world regions: very strong in the Middle East and Europe; strong in Latin America and Southeast Asia; and, with some notable exceptions, less pronounced in Africa and South and East Asia. The recent recovery in these opinion polls has also been uneven, with the most significant improvements in Europe and the Americas (See Figure 3).

One way in which regions vary involves differences between national elites and the general public. An important predictor of U.S. standing among foreign elites is whether U.S. policy is perceived to be helping or harming their interests. The public, however, tends to focus on the justness and morality of U.S. conduct. When foreign publics believe the United States is not playing by the rules, is applying double standards, and is engaging in hypocrisy, U.S. standing suffers. The legacy of Iranian hostility towards the United States has roots in America’s overthrow of Mosaddeq and support for the Shah despite the U.S.’s professed adherence to self-determination/liberal democratic norms.

The disconnect between national elites and mass publics has led to different political dynamics in the Middle East and in Europe, the two regions that have seen American standing plunge most sharply. In the Middle East, authoritarian regimes are often quietly more supportive of American policy than they can say publicly. Similarly, the public’s critical view of America and U.S. policy is often also a political indictment of local regimes, which

are cooperating with the United States. Policies that improve American standing with Arab governments, such as being tough on Saddam Hussein's Iraq or on Khameni's Iran, tend to please rulers and irritate public opinion. Likewise, many Arab leaders were happy to see Israel bomb Hamas and Hezbollah, but the attacks infuriated the Arab public.

Globally, the erosion of American standing was greatest in the least and most democratic regions, the Middle East and Europe respectively.

In Europe, democratically elected leaders by and large express their citizenries' sentiments. Globally, the erosion of American standing was greatest in the least and most democratic regions, the Middle East and Europe respectively.

This should not be surprising. Priorities mattered, and differed, across the regions. In the Middle East, the professed U.S. policy of democratization since 2002 threatened authoritarian regimes; and perceived U.S. disengagement from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reinforced the view that the United States was neither a fair nor an engaged arbiter in the conflict. In East Asia, the continued availability of American markets for East Asian exports had a strong effect on national prosperity, which enjoyed strong support among elites and the public. In addition, many Europeans viewed the American turn toward unilateralism and the doctrine of preemptive war as unraveling the multilateral fabric of Europe's preferred international order. Obama's leadership style is reassuring European publics without eliminating lingering suspicions that the change may be one of style rather than substance.

American standing is also influenced by the presence of a major regional power. Where such a power exists and is hostile, as in Cold War Europe (Soviet Union), or potentially not entirely benign, as in contemporary East Asia (China), American standing is bolstered by fears that domination by the regional power would be even worse. Even in the Middle East, Iran's regional aspirations give the United States some strong support among the elites of Sunni states. In Latin America, where there has traditionally been no dominant regional power, American standing has been more exposed (though that may now be changing with Brazil's emergence on the global stage).

Serious political fallout from this crisis may still lie ahead: waning esteem may limit the credibility of the United States in economic affairs. Some herald the "Beijing consensus"—a Chinese approach that promises capitalist development without political interference—as a replacement for the U.S. model. The "status" of the dollar as the global reserve currency is increasingly a topic of discussion.

American standing may in some places and at some times also be affected by the presence or absence of regional concepts of identity. In areas where people have regional identities, as well as national ones, American standing is diminished. The building of a European polity during the last 25 years—one with supranational institutions and a common currency—can be credited in part to a conscious political attempt to delink Europe from American policies. Many European political elites see it as a better political model not only for Europe, but also for the world.

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in terms of credibility or esteem based on the rise of “competing” models offered by China, Europe, or Russia. Polls in 2009 suggest recent declines in the relative attractiveness of these actors. At the same time, the economic meltdown of 2008-09 has led to widespread critiques of the U.S. economic model. A liberal Chinese economist bemoaned that “the popular view is that the American model is failing.” A Social Democrat in Germany’s parliament concluded, “[the U.S. model] has lost its attraction entirely.”

During the last four decades American standing has sometimes seen major declines, but has typically bounced back because the American model continued to have strong appeal (i.e., esteem). One indicator of this is the continuing attractiveness of the U.S. higher education system and the fact that many who come to study in the United States end up staying (See Figure 4). U.S. universities are being used for models and actively establishing programs in places like Qatar, Singapore, and China.

That said, the potential for a resurgence in America’s current standing varies by region. How America responds to the global financial and economic crisis will be especially important. If the United States provides fewer global and regional public goods, its standing will diminish in East Asia and erode even further in Europe. Similarly, if growing U.S. budget deficits require cuts in the recent expansion of American aid programs in Africa, this might also erode American standing in a continent where trends have been more positive in recent years. Economic and military capabilities in the form of aid or public goods are one of the ways in which U.S. hard power shapes U.S. standing.

International Organizations

To get a sense of how U.S. standing has evolved in international forums, consider Figure 5, which tracks support for the United States in United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) votes since the UN’s founding in 1945.

The United States was instrumental in the UN’s creation. Yet, as Figure 5 illustrates, support for U.S. positions within UNGA has declined considerably over time—a trend that began as early as the 1960s, accelerated during the Reagan years, and, despite an uptick following the USSR’s collapse, resumed its downward slide in the mid-1990s. The drop in support for the United States is especially pronounced during the George W. Bush administration, with

Astonishingly, the absolute level of agreement today between the United States and the typical country in each region is below the level of agreement between America and its existential rival, the Soviet Union, at the height of the Cold War.

agreement between the United States and Latin American, African, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries plummeting by around 50 percent in the last decade alone. Astonishingly, the absolute level of agreement today between the United

States and the typical country in each region is below the level of agreement between America and its existential rival, the Soviet Union, at the height of the Cold War.

Other measures of U.S. standing in the eyes of the world paint a similar picture of decline—even in areas where the United States has traditionally prided itself as a leader. In the Reporters without Borders Press Freedom Index, for example, the United States has fallen from number 17 in 2002 to number 36 in 2008, below Mali, Ghana, and Slovakia.

Why has U.S. standing in the international arena eroded, even though—as Figure 5 demonstrates—its relative power has not?

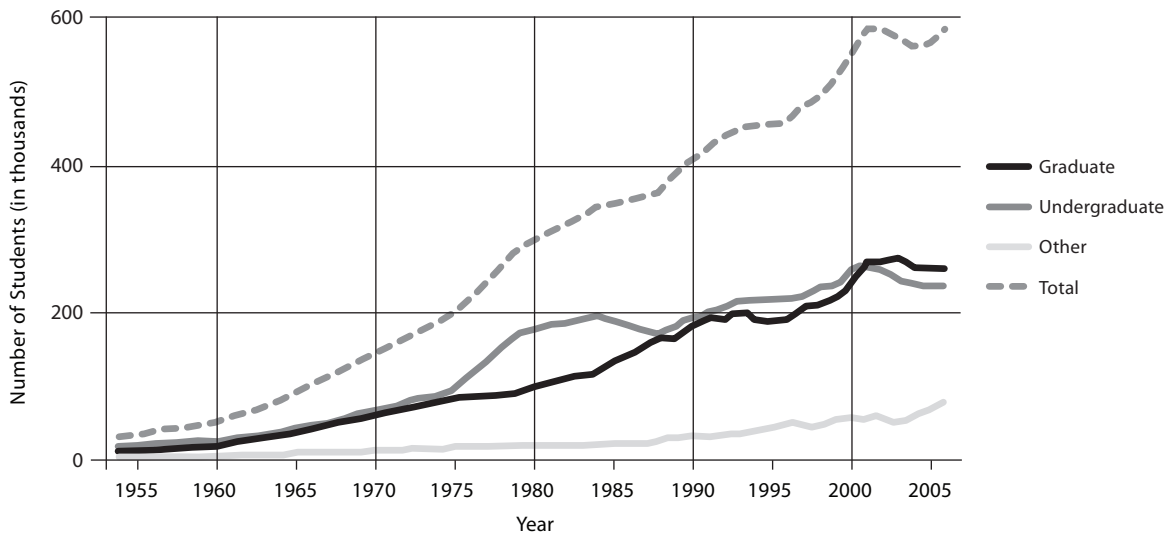
In part, this is because of something beyond America’s control: the sheer number of countries in the world has risen from 151 in 1973 to more than 190 today. More countries means more diverse agendas around the global table, which may compete with or diverge from that of the United States.

But two additional factors have come into play over which America has some control: first, a sense that Washington is no longer a dependable “team player,” and second, a belief that Americans are less committed to providing international public goods today than they were during the Cold War.

Whether these perceptions of U.S. behavior are accurate is open to debate, but when it comes to America’s standing in the world, perceptions define the reality. What is clear is that when the United States is seen as acting as a “team player,” it can have positive repercussions for U.S. standing, whereas perceptions of U.S. unilateralism can have the opposite effect.

Perceived evidence in the late 1990s of the United States behaving as what then French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine memorably termed a “hyperpower”—declining to sign the Ottawa Convention on the Banning of Land Mines, refusing to pay its UN dues, failing to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, not waiting for UN Security Council approval before the 1998 bombing of Iraq, not seeking UN approval in the bombing campaign against Serbia in the spring of 1999—coincided with a drop in agreement with U.S. positions in the UN General Assembly.

Figure 4: International Students in the U.S. by Academic Level



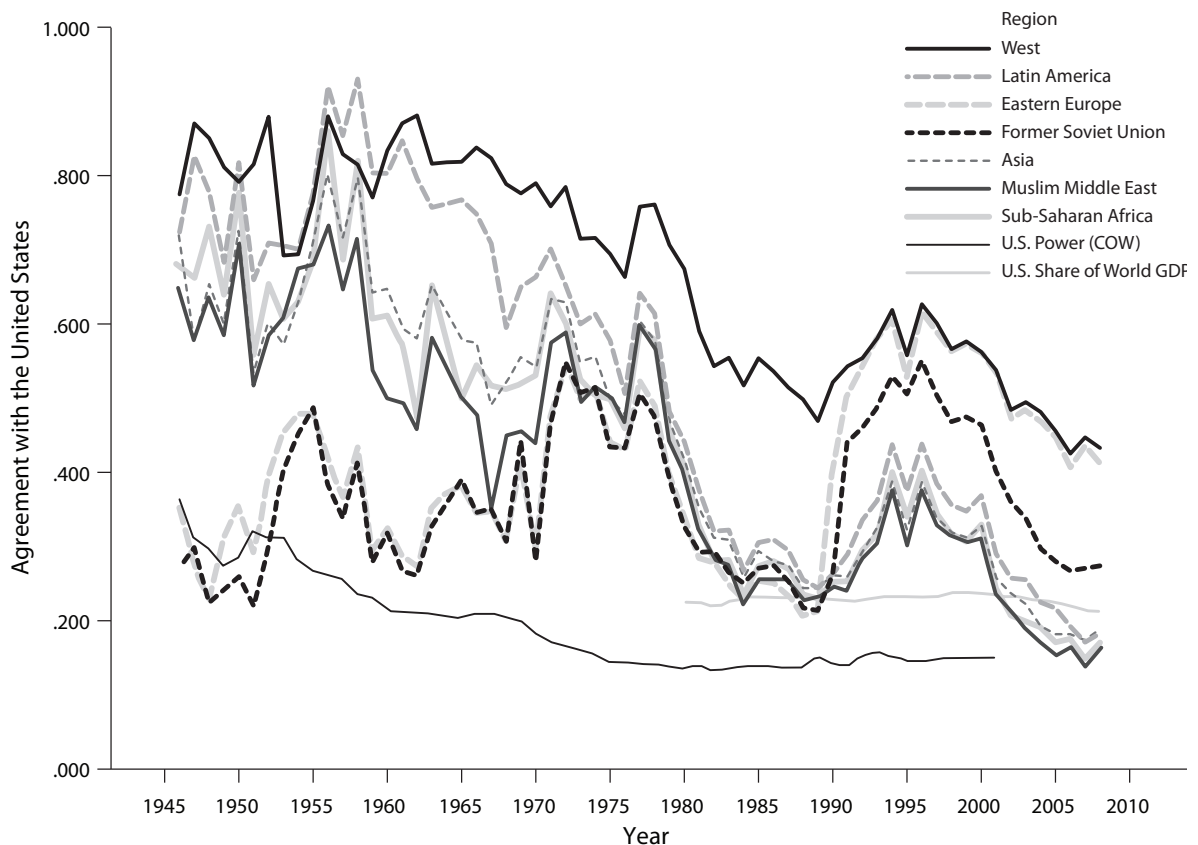
Source: Data from Carol Atkinson, "Does Soft Power Matter? A Comparative Analysis of Student Exchange Programs 1980-2006," unpublished manuscript, Vanderbilt University, Department of Political Science, Nashville, TN (2009) based on Institute of International Education statistics.

Similarly, the Bush administration found that U.S. participation in the Six Party talks on North Korea boosted America’s image in Asia. Yet the administration’s “with us or against us” posture, its unilateral withdrawal from the ABM treaty and dismissal of the Kyoto agreement on climate change, its refusal to join the International Criminal Court, and its violation of the Geneva Convention on torture clearly hurt U.S. standing more broadly, not only in the UN but as measured by opinion polls, statements by foreign governments, and NGOs.

U.S. standing in the global order is also defined by America’s ability and willingness to provide public goods and leadership. After World War II, the United States invested significant resources and political will in a range of global public goods that advanced U.S. interests too—from alliances to extended deterrence, sea lanes security, multilateral peacekeeping, and conflict resolution. The United States also led in restoring and rebuilding the shattered global economy, opening domestic markets, providing liquidity in times of crisis, and promoting free trade.

U.S. efforts in recent years that have provided public goods in humanitarian aid and global health have seen positive returns for the United States. For example, humanitarian aid in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami significantly improved favorable attitudes

Figure 5: Agreement with the U.S. in UN General Assembly Votes (w/ Relative U.S. Power)



Source: Based on Erik Voeten and Adis Merdzanovic, "United Nations General Assembly Voting Data", hdl:1902.1/12379 UNF:3:Hpf6qOkDdzvXF9m66yLTg== http://dvn.iq.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/Voeten/faces/study/StudyPage.xhtml?studyId=38311&studyListingIndex=0_da0ced8e8168aa48c06c85ca0e04. World GDP data comes from: <http://www.econstats.com/weo/V012.htm>. COW data on U.S. relative power: <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/COW2%20Data/Capabilities/nmc3-02.htm>.

towards the United States in Indonesia. And U.S. spending on AIDS and two other diseases, tuberculosis and malaria, primarily in Africa helps to explain that region's distinctive positive attitude towards the United States.

If the United States becomes unwilling or unable to provide such goods, or others perceive it is not carrying its weight, it is a safe bet that U.S. standing and influence will both decline. Of course, there is sometimes a tension between being a team player and an effective leader.

To give an example of teamwork potentially working at cross-currents with leadership, U.S. support of the G20 as the hub of international economic rulemaking demonstrates American willingness to cooperate with an increasingly diverse group of countries; yet the G20's apparent superseding of the G8 in economic affairs inevitably dilutes America's sway in global economic governance, and its emergence in November 2008 as a forum of heads of state, not just finance ministers, ties its new prominence directly to the current economic crisis—a crisis that many global observers believe was sparked by American irresponsibility.

Conversely, leaders must sometimes take a lonely stand against the crowd—as the United States often does in supporting Israel at the United Nations.

United States

America's international standing depends not only on how the United States acts abroad. It also depends on what U.S. citizens think about America's position in the world. What factors, international and domestic, shape their views of standing? Do America's leaders worry about the nation's international standing, and if so, why?

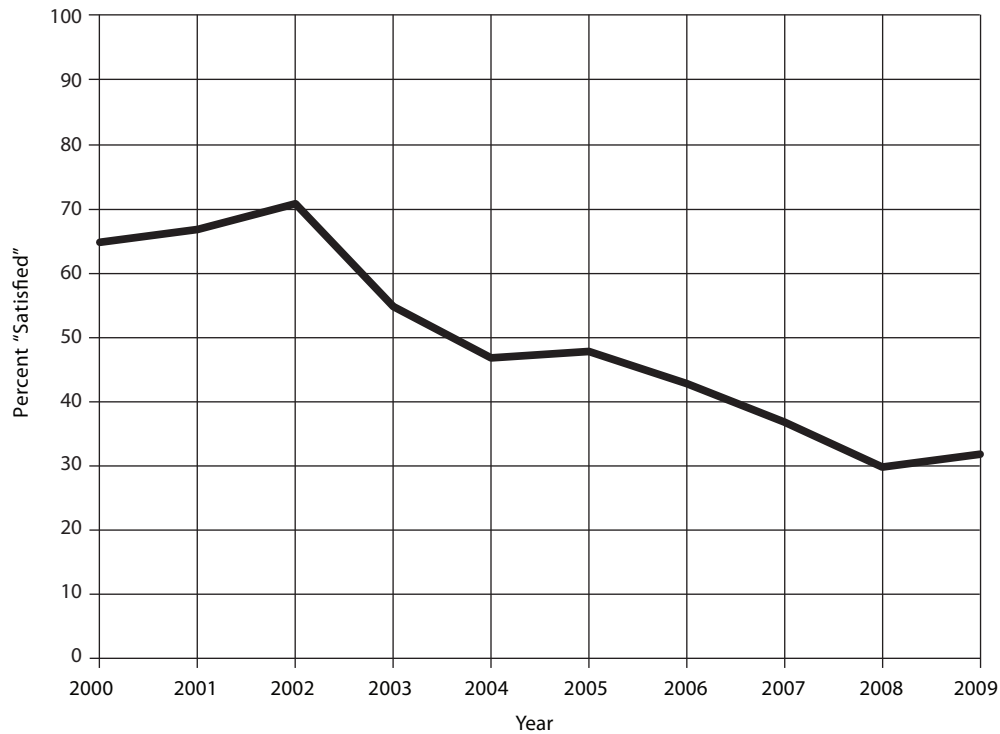
Americans are currently unhappy with the country's low standing abroad. As Figure 6 indicates, public satisfaction with America's standing has declined almost every year since 2002 and is now less than half its peak level. Public confidence in how the rest of the world sees the United States has followed a similar trajectory, declining from 75 percent who believed that the United States had a positive international image before the September 11 terrorist attacks to just 45 percent today.

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The seeming uniformity of the trend masks a substantial divergence of partisan views on standing. For Republicans, standing seems to evoke hard power notions of “resolve,” which favor the credibility side of standing. Democrats appear to emphasize ideas that highlight esteem, such as “legitimacy” and “moral standing.”

This “partisan gap” is also apparent in public perceptions of U.S. standing, which widened considerably during George W. Bush's tenure. As Figure 7 indicates, both Republicans and Democrats believe that U.S. standing declined between 2002 and 2009. Dissatisfaction among Democrats increased sharply during the first term of the Bush presidency; Republican dissatisfaction surged during the second term. Yet, Republicans and Democrats report very different satisfaction levels on standing. As Figures 8a and 8b show, where Democrats and Republicans stand on American standing is shaped by which party controls the presidency. This partisan polarization has increased significantly since the George H.W. Bush presidency (Figure 9).

Figure 6: American Public Satisfaction with U.S. Position in the World



Source: Compiled from Gallup Surveys. See <http://www.gallup.com/poll/104782/Discontent-US-Global-Position-Hits-Record-High.aspx#1> and <http://www.gallup.com/poll/115087/no-perceived-gains-world-standing-post-bush.aspx> (accessed August 11, 2009).

The end of the Cold War may be one reason for this increased divisiveness. The trend lines in Figures 8a and 8b are consistent with recent studies on the politics of U.S. foreign policy that show that between the early 1950s and the mid-1970s, the Cold War had a dampening effect on domestic partisan debate over foreign policy. If partisan politics did not exactly stop at the water's edge during the era of bipolarity, partisan differences over foreign policy were usually more muted and manageable.

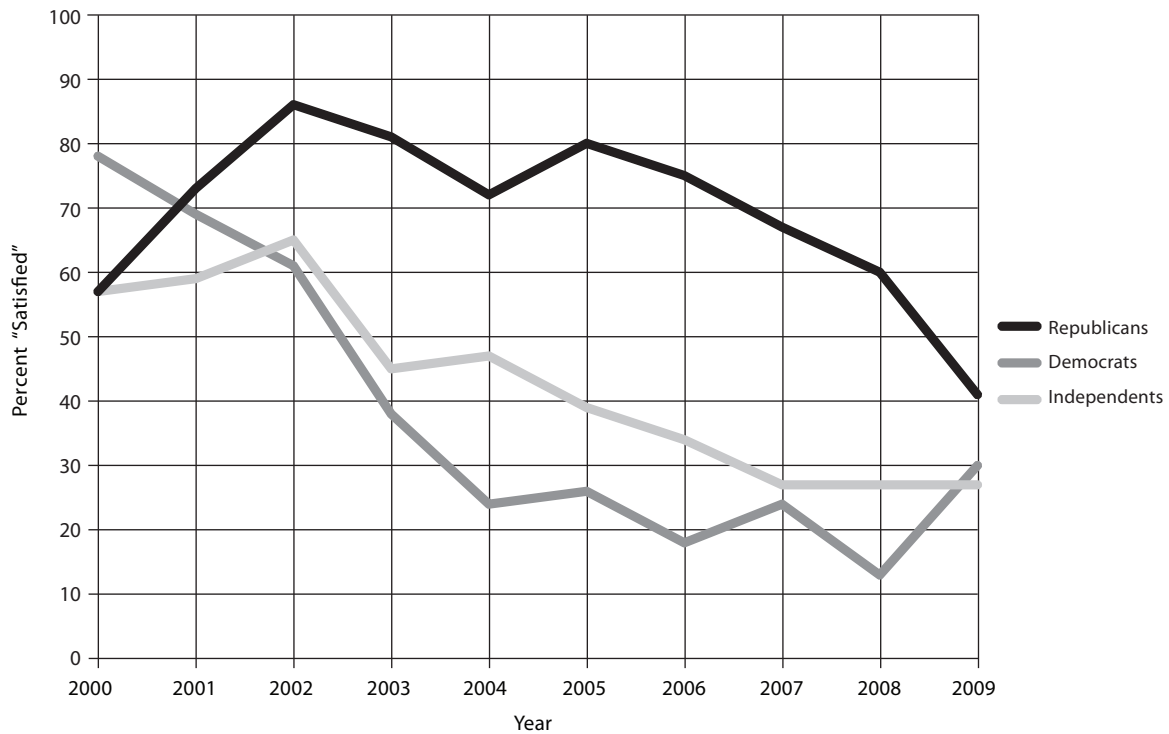
International developments alone, however, do not fully account for these partisan divisions over U.S. standing. American “world views”—beliefs about national power, international legitimacy, and state sovereignty—do color judgments (especially, whether the U.S. is “stronger” or “weaker”) and may mediate partisan perceptions about standing. Political changes at home have also taken their toll. Some of these changes have become part of the political system, such as the ideological homogenization of the two parties, the sorting of the electoral map into “Red” and “Blue” states, and the rise in income inequalities.

Standing across Audiences

Standing in the real world is not neatly separated into three discrete audiences. There are overlaps and clear mutual effects that work across the divides.

For example, opinion in other countries and regions has an indirect though foundational link to international organizations. Perhaps most direct, declining (rising) public support for

Figure 7: American Public Satisfaction with U.S. Position in the World by Political Party



Source: Compiled from Gallup Surveys. See <http://www.gallup.com/poll/104782/Discontent-US-Global-Position-Hits-Record-High.aspx#1> and <http://www.gallup.com/poll/115087/no-perceived-gains-world-standing-post-bush.aspx> (accessed August 11, 2009).

the United States in other countries may make it easier for those governments to withhold (offer) support for U.S. positions in the United Nations and other global forums.

Regional standing also interacts with American politics. It might be fruitful to consider international standing as a domestic performance constraint, influencing public judgments about presidential competence, much like quarterly GDP growth figures. As Figure 10 suggests, in the year 2004, Americans who were “satisfied” with America’s position in the world gave President Bush high job approval ratings; conversely, those who were “dissatisfied” with U.S. standing gave Bush low marks. Obviously, a president’s job approval depends on many things. Still, it may be that international standing functions as a kind of proxy for presidential performance.

Seeking improvements in foreign opinion could have domestic political costs. For example, today a clear majority in foreign opinion favors shutting down Guantanamo and withdrawing from Afghanistan. Majorities in the United States favor the opposite position. Boosting foreign support may fuel criticism that the president is ignoring opinion at home.

The United States has ratified over one hundred other environmental agreements... yet the U.S. is known internationally largely for its unwillingness to ratify Kyoto.

U.S. domestic politics and institutions also shape how the United States is perceived globally. American institutions are designed to divide power. This creates political friction that

Figure 8a: Belief that U.S. Position in the World Has Grown Weaker in Past Year

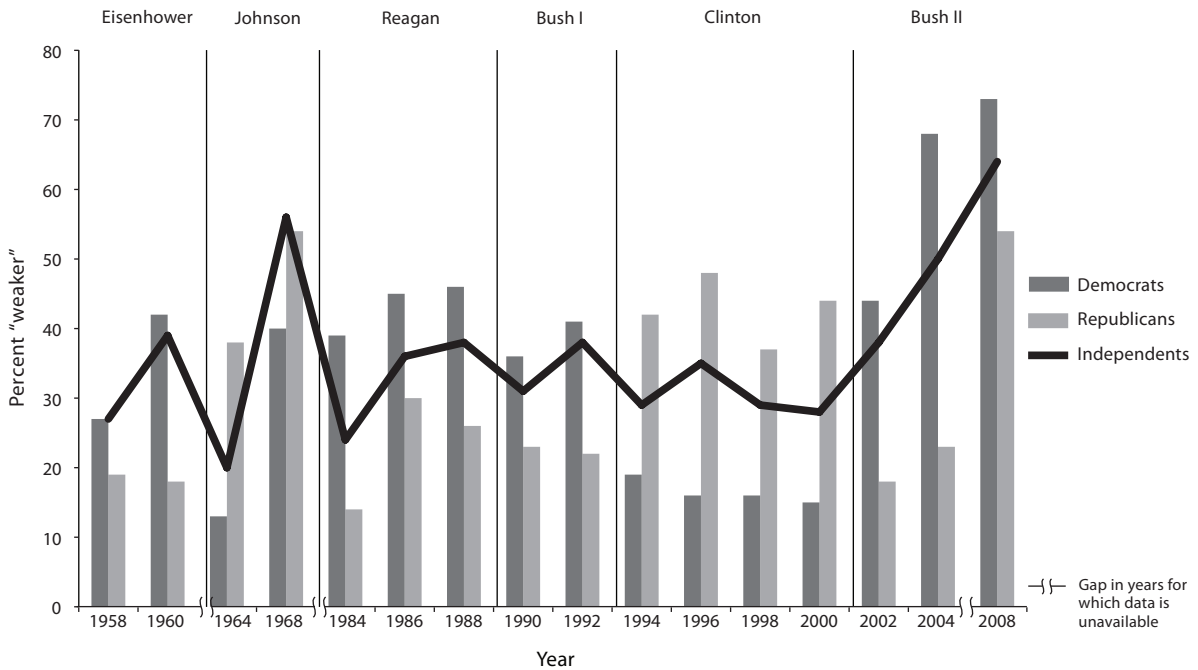
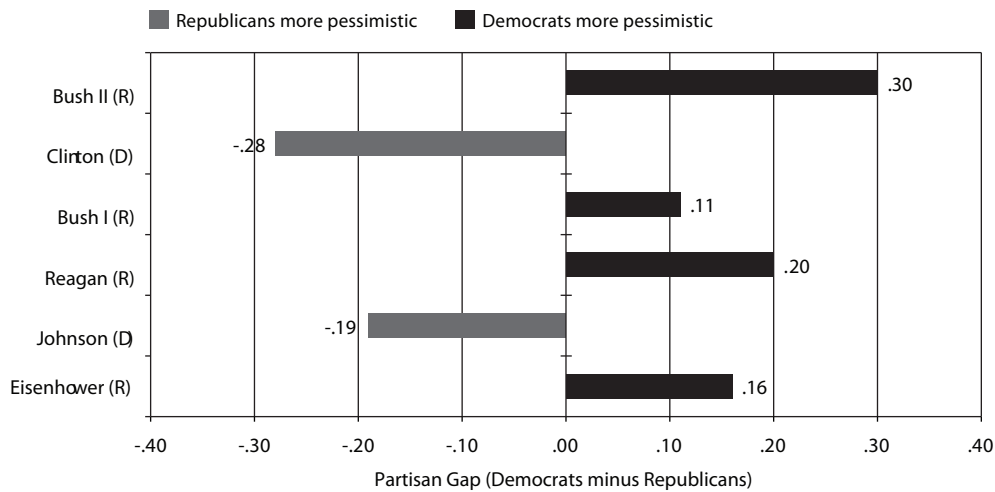


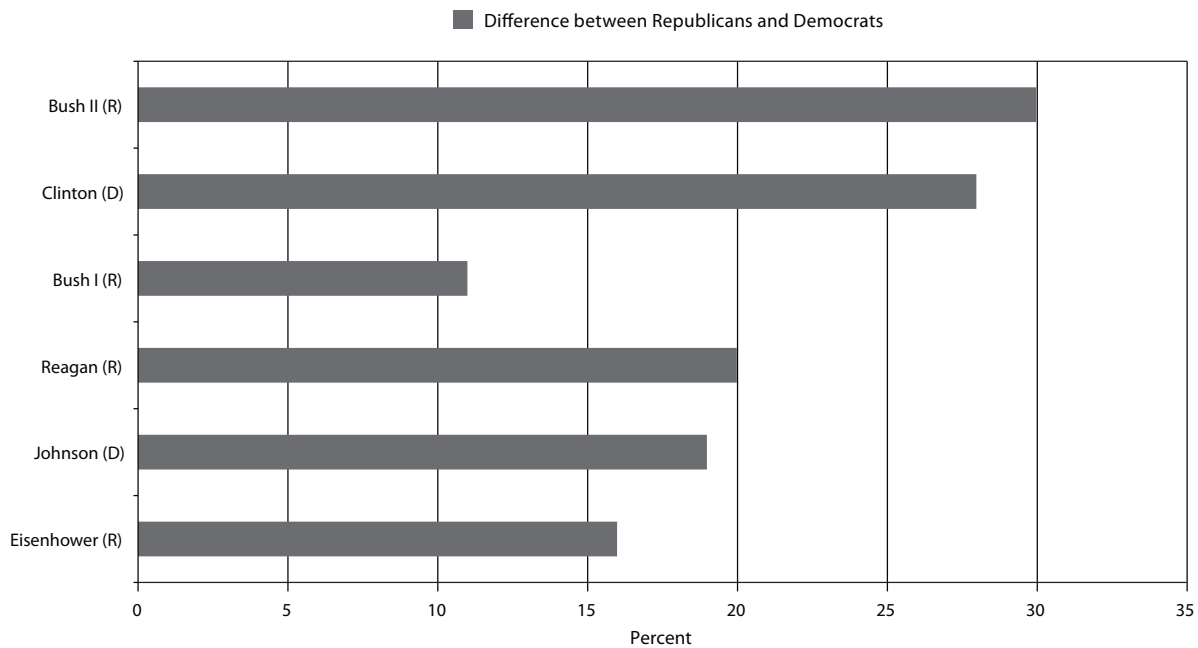
Figure 8b: Partisan Gap in Belief that U.S. Position in the World is Weaker



Source: Based on National Election Survey data. See <http://www.electionstudies.org/> (accessed August 11, 2009).

Americans regard not only as inevitable but as desirable. U.S. presidents can promise abroad and cajole at home, but sometimes checks by other branches of government will constrain their ability to deliver. The United States signed the CTBT in 1996, but the U.S. Senate rejected it in 1999. George W. Bush championed the expansion of free trade but was limited in his ability to act when Congress failed to renew fast track authority in 2007. At times the United States will be perceived to be selfish or hypocritical or both—the outcome not of a deliberate policy as much as the consequence of a government of several independent parts.

Figure 9: The Widening Partisan Divide over U.S. Position in the World



Source: Based on National Election Survey data. See <http://www.electionstudies.org/> (accessed August 11, 2009).

III. Standing and the Future of U.S. Foreign Policy

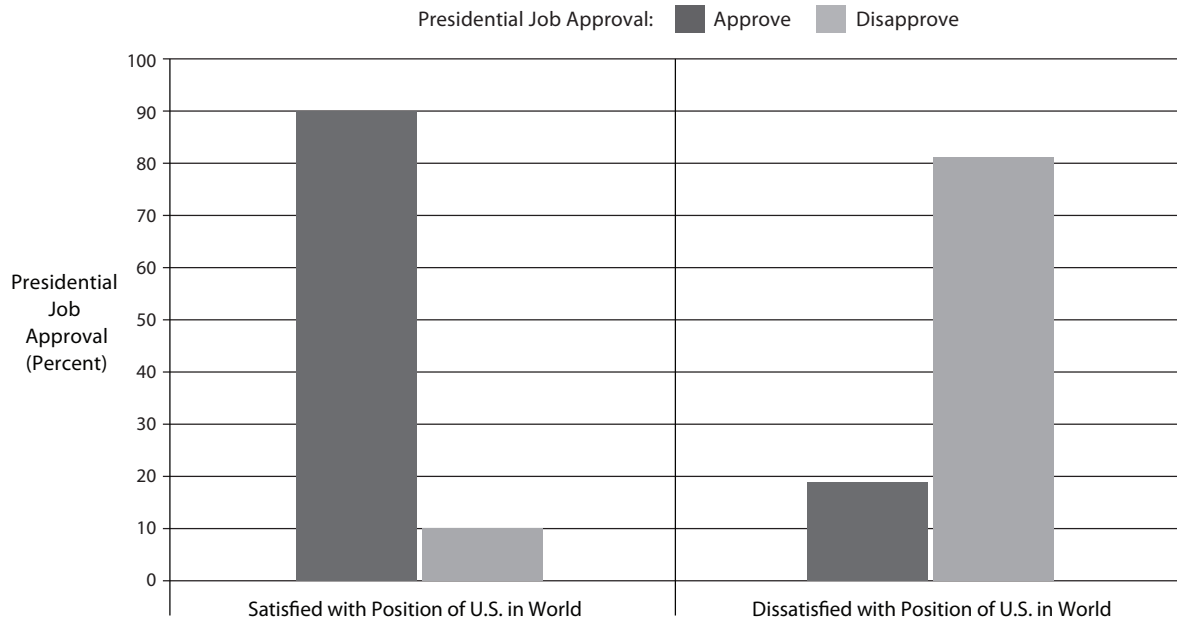
The dynamics of U.S. standing are complex, and we only grasp imperfectly the sources and impact of U.S. credibility and esteem in the world. Yet standing is a matter of consequence for U.S. foreign policy, and American policymakers ignore it at their peril. This section distills five lessons for the role and management of standing in America's foreign relations.

1. Factor standing into national interest

It is important to acknowledge more explicitly the costs and benefits of maintaining standing in policymaking. Decision makers under pressure may be tempted to focus only on short-term impact. But just as business leaders risk their firms' long-term health when they pay attention only to quarterly profits, U.S. leaders compromise the nation's long-term global stature when they neglect America's credibility and esteem. U.S. standing is a form of political capital akin to what accountants call "good will" that is mostly consequential over the long term and affects other nations' willingness to offer it the "benefit of the doubt." Moreover, U.S. credibility and esteem help to mold Americans' sense of unity and collective purpose. Wise

U.S. standing is a form of political capital akin to what accountants call "good will" that is mostly consequential over the long term and affects other nations' willingness to offer it the "benefit of the doubt."

Figure 10: U.S. Standing Abroad and Presidential Approval at Home, 2004



Source: Cable News Network and USA Today. Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll # 2004-35: 'Presidential Election/Stem-Cell Research/Iraq/Foreign Policy' [computer file]. 1st Roper Center for Public Opinion Research version. Lincoln, NE: Gallup Organization [producer], 2004. Storrs, CT: The Roper Center, University of Connecticut [distributor], 2004. http://roperweb.ropercenter.uconn.edu/cgi-bin/hsrun.exe/Roperweb/Catalog40/Catalog40.htm?start=summary_link?archno=USAIPOCNUS2004-35 (accessed August 4, 2009).

policymakers will consider its impact and sometimes protect it even when there are short-term costs.

2. Use different tools for different jobs

As seen above, how others think about standing varies across regions and even between foreign elites and the publics. Inevitably, there will be trade-offs. To maintain its standing among these two constituencies, the United States must thread the needle, serving relatively narrow interests while also supporting broad moral objectives. Similarly, credibility and esteem are both important aspects of standing, yet different actions may be needed to boost one or the other with specific countries at particular times. U.S. foreign policy will not always be able to maximize American standing, but it can do a better job by recognizing that different tools are suited to particular jobs.

3. Heed the bond between power and standing

While standing is not a simple reflection of American capabilities and relative power in the world, a mutual influence exists. U.S. leaders must continue to provide public goods and maintain the alliances that affect U.S. standing in the world. This is not charity—such efforts should be specifically directed at parts of the international system that work in America's as well as the world's interests. The United States should exercise leadership by coordinating the actions of other capable states, sharing with them the task of designing policies and the

costs of carrying them out. Although the benefits—and accompanying expectations—should not be oversold, such efforts add to U.S. standing, and U.S. standing in turn makes it easier to wield power and to ask for burden sharing.

The United States should exercise leadership by coordinating the actions of other capable states, sharing with them the task of designing policies and the costs of carrying them out.

4. Move beyond public diplomacy

While public diplomacy can be improved, it should not be the only approach to standing. During the Cold War, U.S. public diplomacy organizations like USIA worked best when they disseminated factual information and objective news. Deliberate spinning of the news, of the kind now perfected in electoral campaigns and in recent years imitated by the U.S. government, is received with suspicion or outright disbelief in many countries where U.S. standing has plummeted.

At the same time, more resources should be devoted to a broader definition of public diplomacy, one that considers the public goods that matter most to most of humanity. The United States spent more than 600 billion dollars for defense in 2010-11, ten times the amount for diplomacy and foreign assistance—and this even after the Obama administration had sharply reversed the budgetary priorities of the U.S. government. While the U.S. military's strength and presence is key to U.S. standing in the world, greater funding for other types of diplomacy—e.g., humanitarian aid, social services in fractured nations—could enhance credibility and esteem as well, and perhaps at better value.

Going beyond the world of states, we are also seeing a shift to a more pluralist, complex global network of intersecting exchanges. This shift provides opportunities to enhance America's standing. Global chat rooms, business organizations eager to rebrand themselves, thousands of NGOs, private diplomacy (conducted by rock stars, corporate executives, foundation heads, and ex-presidents) now rival in size the foreign aid expenditures of major states. Furthermore, innumerable electronic, audio, and print media outlets, hundreds of thousands of foreign students, the dreamscapes of Hollywood movies, and American Idols all have an effect on standing that is significant even though it cannot be measured readily. The United States needs to consider how it nurtures these efforts without dictating their content. One idea would be to rework the tax code so that it enhances and encourages international activity that earns good will.

5. Support data collection and analysis on standing.

We need to gather more information to better understand this vital aspect of U.S. foreign policy. Most specifically, the United States does not collect reliable indicators on the different facets of standing (esteem and credibility) for different audiences (elites vs. mass publics). The United States supports periodic National Election Surveys at home; questions about standing should be added to the survey. We should also direct some public funds to other types of data collection such as foreign media analysis or collection of statistics on “soft power” exports (e.g., cultural products like films or the impact of U.S. legal precedents).

Conclusion

The United States would be well served by nurturing credibility and esteem, twin foundations of how the world regards the United States. Standing is far from the only concern in, or source of, U.S. foreign policy, yet it remains a touchstone in formulating a wise, long-term American approach to the world.

Moreover, U.S. standing is a marker of self assessment—part and parcel of who Americans are and what we do. Our collective sense of self—our goals, values, interests, and dreams—helps

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to shape expectations that lead to judgments of our actions and form the basis of respect and loathing, appeal and

repulsion. In turn, those sentiments in foreign lands, international organizations, and American voting booths can enhance or constrain U.S. diplomacy and provide a mirror to Americans.

There is much we do not know about standing and more we need to explore. What we do know is that standing is a complicated element of America's foreign relations, and it deserves more rigorous study. It is our hope that more attention to standing will give policymakers and citizens a better understanding of how this asset can serve America's interests around the world.

Dissenting Views

Our caveats with the report, which is in every way an exemplary product of intellectual collegiality and good will, are three-fold.

First, as this report suggests, what Americans think about U.S. standing is heavily influenced by whether one is Republican or Democrat. When Republicans hold the presidency, Democrats become progressively more dissatisfied with U.S. standing than Republicans do. The opposite holds true when Democrats hold the presidency. This pattern has prevailed since the 1950s.

In light of this pattern, this report makes too much of the recent decline of U.S. standing, implicitly indicting the administration of George W. Bush and endorsing President Obama's rhetoric to "restore" that standing. This point of view is certainly popular and defensible—one could even say confirmed by the elections. But we would have preferred a disclaimer much earlier in the report warning the reader to be aware that political bias affects perceptions of standing. The academic community, unbalanced as it is between self-identified Republicans and Democrats, is not immune to such bias.

Second, just as U.S. standing is heavily influenced by political bias in the United States, it is equally influenced by political dispositions in foreign countries. At least some, perhaps a

At least some, perhaps a good deal, of the dissatisfaction with U.S. standing around the world has nothing to do with U.S. esteem and credibility.

good deal, of the dissatisfaction with U.S. standing around the world has nothing to do with U.S. esteem and credibility. It has more to do with the politics and foreign

policies of those countries themselves, or with the attitudes of groups within them.

As the report suggests, dissatisfaction with U.S. standing is highest in the Middle East and Europe. However, European views of the United States as clumsy, warlike, and uncultured begin in the 19th century, and European criticisms today reflect European attitudes about the use of force, which are reflected in and reinforced by weaknesses in military power as much as by doubts about U.S. esteem. In the Middle East, poll respondents are unhappy about many local things—ethnic and sectarian conflicts, government oppression, lack of economic opportunity, Arab-Israeli and other regional (Iran-Iraq) disputes, and so on. Much of this unhappiness gets displaced onto the United States and would register just as strongly against European powers, Russia, or China if they wielded the preeminent power the United States has today, regardless of the policies they might pursue.

The report notes the declining level of support in the United Nations for the United States and points to factors that have increased or decreased the percentage of countries voting with the U.S. at particular moments.

The most striking thing about the data, however, is that support for the United

Republican or Democratic, unilateral or multilateral, support for the U.S. just keeps going down.

States has declined, with some ups and downs, since the 1950s. Republican or Democratic, unilateral or multilateral, support for the U.S. just keeps going down. This result may have as much to do with the dynamics of the UN itself as with U.S. credibility and esteem.

Third, it is not clear that standing has independent consequences for effective diplomacy. Our colleagues have argued that standing involves both credibility and esteem. As they recognize, these two factors are not easily aggregated, do not have the same sources, and can go in different directions. We believe that credibility matters. Credibility is based on power and past performance, not on sentiments about the United States. The impact of esteem is far less evident. Obama has raised American esteem but has not produced more European troops for Afghanistan, secured concessions from North Korea, or made any headway with Iran.

Conversely, in the early 1980s President Reagan incurred sharp drops in U.S. standing to expand dramatically U.S. defense capabilities, challenge the Soviets to an arms race they could not win, and prod NATO to deploy intermediate range nuclear missiles in Europe. The report highlights these policies as evidence that standing matters in terms other than capabilities or power. But in fact, the low standing of these policies mattered not at all. As one Soviet official at the time later testified, these policies had a significant impact on Moscow and contributed to ending the Cold War: “Reagan’s course in the early 1980s sent a clear signal to Gorbachev and his associates of the dangerous and counterproductive nature of the Soviet Union’s further expansion, which was overstressing its resources, aggravating tensions, and provoking hostile reactions across the globe.” Similarly, George W. Bush undertook a military surge in Iraq at a time when his own domestic and U.S. world standing were at an all-time low. However one feels about the Iraq war, U.S. policy in Iraq is much better off today because that surge and other policies succeeded.

Stephen D. Krasner and Henry R. Nau