

Persuasion Across International Borders

Diana C. Mutz

University of Pennsylvania

Research on political persuasion in the United States is overwhelmingly focused on the extent to which Americans persuade other Americans. Within the field of political science, it is even more narrowly centered on the study of changing people's minds about political candidates or policy issues. Within these confines, scholars have made great strides in understanding what (occasionally) changes people's minds about candidates and issues.

This highly internal focus is understandable to a point. After all, it is much easier to study persuasion among Americans if one lives in the United States. But it ignores the fact that many of the people we most want to persuade today are not voters nor even necessarily Americans. In an age of global communication, there are many other forms of political persuasion that, I will argue, ought to receive more scholarly attention than they currently do. The reason this area of research is particularly important is that cross-national persuasion has never been more technologically feasible, nor perhaps more politically necessary.

Nevertheless, this is not a form of persuasion that is currently deemed central to American political science. In 1996, when Paul Sniderman, Dick Brody and I published an edited volume entitled *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* (1996), there was no chapter devoted to this topic, nor even a fleeting mention of it within any of the individual chapters. This is not

to suggest that no one in the field had thought about such issues. Discussions of international persuasion could be found under terms such as strategic influence, soft power, public diplomacy, propaganda analysis, and international public relations. But as described in greater detail in this chapter, this material is not about theory or empirical research pertaining to what produces effective persuasion across international borders.

This omission is unfortunate because communication and persuasion are now more global than ever before in human history. Radio has long been used to broadcast over international borders. Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Liberty are well known for such efforts. Magazines were also frequently printed in other languages and distributed overseas as a means of promoting American ideals abroad. But cross-national persuasion in earlier eras was necessarily more limited in scope than what is now possible. So while governments have long sought to use media as a means of persuading across national borders, the technological capacity to do so is now much greater.

Two technological developments facilitating this change are particularly noteworthy. First, the development of satellite radio and television means that one need not be located in a neighboring country in order to reach audiences within another country's borders. Distance now matters very little. Instead, a program can be put on a satellite uplink and then reflected back to be received elsewhere in the world, either directly by a viewer with a dish antenna, or by a local television affiliate or cable system. Of course, deliberate efforts to jam foreign-based satellites are common in some countries. To circumvent such efforts, satellite broadcasters now

switch satellites regularly and/or build redundancy into their efforts through the use of multiple satellites.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the widespread availability of computers, cellphones and the internet have fundamentally changed who can communicate with whom internationally. The internet has turned any individual or group into a potential agent of international persuasion, allowing individuals, even those with relatively few resources, to transmit via an existing satellite. One no longer needs personal satellite access in order to influence others abroad.

In addition to allowing access to new audiences, technology makes it far more difficult today for governments to prevent online communicators from attempting to influence one another. Attempts to block signals or filter the internet are undertaken by some governments including China, North Korea and Iran most prominently. Nonetheless, it is far more difficult than it once was to selectively target certain types of content. Countries censor less because they will lose useful content as well as what they perceive to be threatening and undesirable information.

If international persuasion is now far more feasible than it once was, one might expect research in this area to be burgeoning as well. This is far from the case. I begin this chapter by describing several areas of scholarly research that one might expect to have produced a body of knowledge on international persuasion. Next, I discuss what is likely to be holding back this particular type of persuasion research. Third, I outline why current scholars of largely domestic political persuasion have a great deal to offer the international arena.

Where Does One Find Research on International Persuasion?

To provide a brief, admittedly incomplete, sketch of research on international persuasion, I begin by outlining three areas of study where international persuasion was clearly of concern. These include propaganda analysis at the beginning the of the 20th century, experimental persuasion research around the time of the Second World War, and contemporary research on public diplomacy and international public relations.

Propaganda Analysis. I began my search for studies of international persuasion where I believed they had originated – with research on propaganda during wartime. An academic movement known as “propaganda analysis” was under way in the United States as early as the turn of the 20th century. However, as it turns out, propaganda analysis was a misleading term. It was explicitly *not* an effort to understand and document the effects of persuasive communications. Instead, propaganda analysis was a progressive, reformist movement with the formally stated purpose of preventing the mass public from being influenced by propaganda from abroad as well as by advertisers within the US. As Sproule (1987: 68) describes it, the “raison d’etre of propaganda analysis was to create a citizenry alert to modern socio-political persuasion.”

Propaganda analysis sought to achieve its goals through a huge public outreach program. It sponsored adult education programs and distributed newsletters that emphasized the sinister nature of persuasion and how people might engage in impulsive, intolerant action as a result of it (e.g., LeBon 1960). Importantly, they did not document influence but rather

discouraged this possibility by making it more salient in the American mind. Before World War I, there was no research paradigm for studying the influence of information/propaganda on attitudes. The critical case study approach was used to alert the public to how their opinions might be influenced, but persuasion itself was never documented in any contemporary scientific sense. Interestingly, despite Germany's extensive propaganda efforts, and widespread assumptions about their effectiveness, the Germans apparently had no systematic evidence of its impact on foreign audiences either (Bernstorff 1920; Vieveck 1930).

During this period, the U.S. Committee on Public Information (CPI) engaged in extensive promotional activities encouraging acceptance of the war. Many historians credit the pervasiveness of the CPI with the backlash against all forms of persuasion. As one historian of propaganda describes the CPI's activities, they included "a vast system of news handouts for journalists, tens of millions of copies of its pamphlets, wide circulation of war posters, several films, millions of advertisements donated by business organizations, war expositions in several states, "Americanization" Committees for each ethnic minority group, and 75,000 Four Minute Men speakers, who presented short appeals between features at the nation's movie houses" (Sproule 1987: 63) These activities probably served as the origins of American cynicism about persuasion: "The official propaganda campaign of the CPI provided the immediate impetus for postwar propaganda awareness by becoming so all pervasive, by whipping up idealistic enthusiasms that were almost doomed to disappointment, and by catering to atrocity tales and spy stories that would soon be discredited" (Sproule 1987: 63).

Having served as targets of their own country's propaganda efforts, the American public became highly cynical about persuasion. After the first World War, for example, John Dewey

(1918: 216-17), questioned “whether the word ‘news’ is not destined to be replaced by the word ‘propaganda.’” The idea of government control of information thus became increasingly suspect.

By the 1950s, propaganda analysis had been replaced by another scholarly paradigm. Nonetheless, the desire to insulate Americans from the perils of persuasion lived on in classics such as Vance Packard’s (1957) book *The Hidden Persuaders*, among others. By educating the mass public about advertising, they hoped to prevent “corporate mind control” and excessive consumerism.

The Psychology of Attitude Change. As the U.S. was gearing up for World War II, social scientists began to use more systematic, scientific approaches to understanding when persuasion was successful, self-consciously emulating the hard sciences. This approach represented the beginnings of empirical research on political persuasion. In 1939, the Rockefeller Foundation funded Harold Lasswell’s effort to develop systematic content analysis to address the “what” part of Lasswell’s (1948) classic formulation of persuasive communication as “Who (says) What (to) Whom (in) What Channel (with) What Effect.” A few years later, Rockefeller also supported Carl Hovland’s program of experimental studies of persuasion at Yale University. Hovland’s goal was to produce a means of quantifying persuasive effects. Rather than using intuition about what was and was not persuasive, Hovland’s research group advocated controlled experiments. As part of this effort, Hovland and his team developed the “Why We Fight” film series which was shown to soldiers during basic training to improve troop morale.

This new research paradigm was heralded by many for producing more reliable knowledge about influence and for being more useful to policy makers. As a consequence, Hovland is said to be “arguably the single person most responsible for establishing attitude change as a dominant topic in social psychology and beyond” (Brinol and Petty 2012: 286). Hovland’s findings are summarized in *Experiments on Mass Communication* (Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield 1949) and in *Communication and Persuasion* (1953), both considered to be classics in the then-nascent field of persuasion and attitude change.

The theoretical approach used by Hovland’s group was straightforward message learning. In other words, persuasion required a series of steps that led to learning the content of a persuasive message (exposure, attention, comprehension, etc.). This multi-step approach was the forerunner of McGuire’s (1985) multi-step model, as well as Zaller’s (1992) Receive-Accept-Sample model.

Once the persuasive information was learned, Hovland and colleagues assumed that people would naturally be persuaded by its inherent logic. Thus the focus of their research was on what would induce people to learn new information rather than explicitly what induced persuasion (Brinol and Petty 2012). Persuasion research has by now moved far beyond this assumption; people can be influenced by things they do not learn or accept (Thorson 2016), and, less surprisingly, they can learn things that do not affect their views. Even so, aspects of Hovland’s contribution can be seen in the ongoing emphasis on source credibility, studies of message characteristics, and so forth.

Surprisingly, although Hovland is widely known for his work with the Office of War Information (OWI), his research on persuasion was not internationally focused. Instead, it was centered on encouraging public support for the war effort at home, and encouraging troop morale. Hovland's wartime work is widely credited with launching the subfield of persuasion and attitude change within psychology. To date, however, this impressive legacy of research demonstrates little interest in cross-national persuasion.

International Relations, Soft Power and Public Diplomacy. Another logical place to look for studies of international persuasion would be within the subfield of international relations in political science. In one respect, the very notion of persuasion conflicts with the dominant theoretical paradigm in international relations which assumes that attitudes are fixed and a function of people's interests. Rational choice suggests that their attitudes should not be expected to change unless their interests do (e.g., Green and Shapiro 1996).

However, within international relations, studies of international diplomacy are an exception. They attribute tremendous importance to a home country's ability to persuade other countries to feel more positively toward the home country. Nye (1990, 2004) coined the term *soft power* to describe the ability to obtain cooperation from other countries through cultivation of a positive national image. Soft power is, by his definition, non-coercive; it consists of shaping the preferences of people in other countries. As he describes soft power, it is attraction that leads to acquiescence, whether for positive or negative ends. It can be achieved intentionally through strategic mass communication, at times unintentionally through popular culture, or by systematic efforts to influence domestic news in the target country.

Public diplomacy efforts were institutionalized in the United States through agencies such as the United States Information Agency (USIA) which printed magazines in foreign languages for distribution overseas, broadcast U.S.-friendly programming on shortwave radio, and sponsored cultural exchanges. The most widely-known American soft power effort under the USIA began shortly after the U.S. entry into World War II. The Voice of America (VOA) was initially a radio service that broadcast news from an American perspective overseas in dozens of languages. It later expanded to include television and internet programming as well. For some, the VOA was simply American propaganda directed toward foreign targets. Regardless of the terminology one deems appropriate, it is clear that VOA's purpose was to promote American interests and policies abroad.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, the US government perceived less of a need for an organization focused on international persuasion. Thus in 1999, the USIA was closed and some of its remaining functions were folded into the U.S. Department of State, where VOA remains today.

Remarkably, there has been little empirical research on the effectiveness of soft power efforts. On the one hand, U.S. soft power efforts during the Cold War are often anecdotally credited with the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland, and with creating the favorable conditions that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, many scholars question how much of a difference soft power actually makes (see, e.g., Ferguson 2004; Gray 2011). Neither side of this debate brings much to the table by way of convincing evidence. Nevertheless, opinions range from viewing soft power as hopelessly naïve evidence of an ongoing belief in American exceptionalism, to those who view it as an acceptable compliment

to hard power, to those who view it as essential to American foreign policy. Still others view it as worthless in the short run, but essential to the long game.

Although U.S. government efforts of this kind have been scaled back since the Cold War, economic globalization has led to much greater interest in international persuasion by companies and interest groups. Many multi-national companies now hire international public relations firms to pave the way for foreign direct investment or trade relations. Non-profit organizations focused on global causes may likewise hire such firms to improve their chances of achieving their goals overseas.

Global public relations is now a burgeoning industry (see Center for Global Public Relations nd.). But based on publicly available material, most of the research literature focused on international public relations generally amounts to in-depth descriptions of case studies. These descriptions serve to illustrate successful or unsuccessful attempts to persuade across international boundaries and hopefully carry generalizable lessons for future public relations campaigns. But there is little documentation of the kind social scientists would consider sufficient for observing persuasive effects. Moreover, the people in charge of PR efforts tend to come from advertising or public relations backgrounds, where there is little emphasis on the kind of basic research that is needed to understand persuasion in this context. Evaluation efforts tend to go no further than focus groups among convenience samples (see, e.g., Farwell 2012).

In the description above, American political scientists may note some obvious parallels between the progression of research on election campaign-related persuasion and soft power

efforts in the U.S.. In *The Victory Lab*, Issenberg (2012), describes the accumulation of knowledge about winning election campaigns. As he notes, until fairly recently, political consultants operated more or less based on intuition, without the benefit of social science research:

In an environment where very little is known about what kinds of campaign tactics actually work, those who purchase these campaign services must rely on their intuitive sense of what makes for an effective campaign. There is a natural tendency to gravitate toward tactics that command the attention of others... Campaigns crave attention and credibility: expensive, large-scale, professionally crafted communication is a way to demonstrate one's seriousness of purpose (p. 35).

As academic researchers have become more involved in this type of research, many campaign "truisms" have been toppled. For example, it turns out not to be the case that, dollar for dollar, direct mail is the most effective way to get out the vote (Bond et al. 2012), or that television is necessarily the most efficient way to win elections (Issenberg 2012). Likewise, without research on international persuasion, much of what we think we know about persuasion across international borders may turn out to be incorrect.

What Holds Back Academic Research?

As a result of what I have described above, the body of research that might inform attempts at international persuasion remains extremely thin. Perhaps most notably, research of this kind is not plentiful in the field of political psychology or political persuasion. It is an

open question as to why there is so little research in this vein. My own theory is that this gap stems from multiple causes, including 1) practicality; 2) an assumption that persuasion is persuasion, and thus research findings are independent of context, regardless of whether the audience is college sophomores or overseas populations; 3) academic ambivalence about the ethics of persuasion; and 4) skepticism that such approaches can effectively persuade foreign audiences.

Practicality. It is logistically more difficult to study foreign audiences. Nonetheless, there are many opportunities to study the effectiveness of soft power even within the United States. The English version of Al-Jazeera is viewed by many in the U.S., and by far more in other languages overseas. Indeed, many laud the breadth and depth of its international coverage as well as its riveting images (e.g., Kaplan 2009). But do its viewers form more sympathetic views of the Arab world as a result? Or do those with more sympathetic views to begin with simply self-select into this audience? Scholars of political persuasion have obvious experience studying very similar research questions in the past.

The Chinese and Russian governments regularly pay publications such as *The Washington Post* and the *New York Times* to include supplemental sections from their state-run media. News organizations generally treat these supplements as advertising and will run them so long as they do not advocate illegal actions or otherwise violate the publication's advertising policy (McGann 2010). More recently, the *Washington Post's* website incorporated a page called Chinawatch. If one has extremely good vision and looks carefully at the small print, one can read that it is a paid supplement written by *The China Daily*, the English language voice of the Chinese government (Fallows 2011).

China has particularly extensive soft power efforts in progress in the United States including internet videos that promote foreign direct investment in the U.S. by Chinese companies, and videos intended to make their government appear more similar to the U.S. government. Further, Chinese Radio International currently broadcasts Beijing-produced radio content using 33 radio stations. These stations broadcast China-friendly news content and entertainment programming from stations in Washington, DC, Philadelphia and San Francisco. Under the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act, (FARA) anyone seeking to influence American policy or public opinion is supposed to register the fact that they are doing so, and they are not allowed to hold broadcast licenses. Technically speaking, China does not own these stations; it merely leases them. Regardless, the FARA regulations do not apply to cable or satellite outlets, nor to the internet. This makes it quite easy to communicate with the American public without revealing the source behind a message.

Even while writing this last paragraph, I received a personalized email with the subject line, "Have a Merry Arab Christmas!" As it continued, "Replace 'Merry Christmas' with 'Meelad Majeed', turkey with the lamb-rice dish 'kibbeh' and carolling with the traditional dabkeh dance - and have yourself a merry Middle Eastern Christmas!" Efforts to emphasize the similarity of people across religious and geographic groups is obviously not limited to radio, television and print.

Online efforts of this kind are low cost and omnipresent today. For those considering whether online persuasion efforts are effective, what immediately comes to mind are ISIS's official recruitment videos and social media campaigns. In some ways, the recruitment videos are like any other army recruitment video, promising recruits a larger purpose in life.

Moreover, they have grown noticeably higher in quality and production values, and also more sophisticated in technique. For example, ISIS now use other young men as spokesmen in their appeals rather than older ISIS leaders. In addition to a Twitter app, ISIS runs hashtag campaigns so that their messages will trend on twitter. In other words, their efforts are similar to the PR campaigns of large corporations. Although their persuasive efforts may not be successful on a large scale, convincing even a small number of people can have potentially large consequences.

So fearful have Americans become of ISIS's potential for persuasion that when CNN debate moderator Wolf Blitzer recently asked Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump, "Are you open to closing parts of the Internet?" He responded, "Yes sir, I am." Trump defended his statement by referring to the need to prevent the recruitment of terrorists online.

Persuasion Across Contexts. Another possible explanation for why this type of persuasion has not captured scholarly attention is that some believe there is no need to study political persuasion in this particular context because our major theories and findings are equally applicable to persuasion regardless of context. As Lerner (1971: 45) put it, "International persuasion is subject to the same conditions as any other form of persuasive communication." In his view, we could simply apply the same theories and findings we already have toward new audiences. For example, he suggested that just as in Hovland's research on persuading domestic audiences, credibility would be a key problem in international persuasion because foreign sources would be treated with suspicion. While this is undoubtedly true, today many sources are not easily identified at the time the information is consumed. And even when they are identified, they may not be regarded as lacking credibility if they have already cultivated a reputation for reliability.

While accumulated knowledge is certainly a place to start, I am not convinced that our major theories of persuasion adapt easily outside the U.S. electoral context. For example, consider the well-documented and persistent finding in political persuasion showing that the likelihood of being persuaded by a message is inversely related to the likelihood of being exposed to it (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1948; Zaller 1992). This makes perfect sense in the context of persuasion brought about by seeking out political news and information in the United States—those most interested and involved are also those most pre-committed to their political views and thus are unlikely to be persuaded, despite high levels of exposure. But this does not necessarily make sense in the context of international political persuasion efforts. Who might be most likely to listen to a message from another country, one that contradicts the zeitgeist in one's own nation? Possibly those who have doubts about the domestic political situation in their own country, and who are thus open to other perspectives.

Likewise, Zaller's (1992) well-known observations about the countervailing forces of opposing candidates – the self-cancelling communications that make it appear as if persuasion is less powerful – make less sense outside of the American two-party system. Should we apply such a theory to less open societies where flows of information are clearly more one-sided and there is no reason to believe that countervailing forces are already rendering opposing forces moot?

These comments are not meant to suggest that there is nothing relevant to be found in existing research. Some extant research is potentially applicable. For example, research on persuasion with low credibility sources is sure to be relevant to international persuasion (e.g., Tormala, Briñol & Petty 2006). Further, studies of narrative persuasive influence from fictional

media suggest that entertainment programming may attract more apolitical audiences, and include politically persuasive messages (Strange 2002). When programs are consumed for entertainment purposes, they are seldom subject to the same level of scrutiny or counter-argument as non-fictional political programming. Moreover, studies have already demonstrated the capacity to change real world issue attitudes using fictional programs (Mutz and Nir 2010).

Even some research on cross-partisan persuasion between Republicans and Democrats may be relevant. For example, one of the key problems in persuading people outside one's own group is the tendency to advance arguments that are appealing to one's own group, but not necessarily to the group one wants to persuade. As Gray (2011: vi) suggests, "American culture is so powerful a programmer that it can be difficult for Americans to empathize with, or even understand, the somewhat different values and their implications held deeply abroad." Particularly when differing moral values are involved, political advocates tend to make arguments grounded in their own moral values rather than those of the target audience. These arguments are systematically less persuasive than arguments framed in the values of the target group (see Feinberg and Willer 2015). Although empirical evidence on this topic comes from studying Republicans and Democrats, inevitably such differences also play an important role in effective cross-national persuasion.

American Ambivalence about Persuasion. A third explanation for the lack of research in this area stems from Americans' fundamental ambivalence about persuasion more generally. Even in the context of domestic elections, Americans regularly express disdain for the persuasive efforts of candidates, especially those whom they do not support. Persuasive efforts

in this case become mere “propaganda.” Campaigns are deemed superficial and degrading even by the campaigns themselves. If election campaigns are ideally supposed to be forums for political persuasion, then it is ironic that such efforts are so widely denigrated by their association with persuasion and the widespread belief that “our politicians will do or say just about anything to win office” (Gardner 2009: x). Merely “informing” as opposed to persuading is seen as a far more respectable activity. Unfortunately, this distinction has never held up to close scrutiny (e.g., Gardner 2009).

On the one hand, one might assume that the highly commercial culture of the United States would be extremely open to fighting a global war of ideas. After all, isn't this what the marketplace ideal demands? But as a former head of Voice of America noted,

Paradoxical as it may seem, Americans cheerfully accept a constant barrage of commercial advertising that is that is often transparently manipulative and misleading and tolerate a great deal of skewed news reporting in the national media, yet remain very sensitive to any effort by the government to control the flow of information ... (Lord 2006: 57).

It is, indeed, puzzling that the same country that proudly flaunts its First Amendment rights and champions the notion of a marketplace of ideas has serious qualms about promoting its ideas abroad. In short, Americans are ambivalent about whether we want to be in the business of winning others' hearts and minds. In the shadow of unpopular wars, many may feel less certain that the American story is one worth promoting; this feeling is likely to be prevalent

among American academics in particular. Further, the lingering effects of propaganda analysis seem solidly planted in our culture.

Skepticism about effectiveness. A final reason for staying out of the business of international persuasion research has been that one does not believe it can be effective. Back in 1971, Daniel Lerner wrote an article entitled, “Is International Persuasion Sociologically Feasible?” where he concluded (without evidence) that it was. Of course, this is, at root, an empirical question that research can answer. Gray (2011: v-vi) laments that, “Unfortunately, although the concept of American soft power is true gold in theory, in practice it is not so valuable.” But as he later acknowledges, “To date, the idea of soft power has not been subjected to a sufficiently critical forensic examination... [It] requires more rigorous examination than it has received thus far.” So it is not an accumulation of null findings that plague this possibility, so much as a lack of systematic evidence of any kind. Others suggest that winning the overseas public’s hearts and minds is critical to defeating ISIS in particular (e.g., Stavridis 2015).

To date, I have found only a few studies that evaluate whether international persuasion is effective. These studies look strictly at American audiences. In one exception, Aldrich and colleagues (2012) examined the effectiveness of a film produced by the Chinese government to improve Americans’ perceptions of China. The message visually emphasized Chinese contributions to science, music, sports, technology, and so forth. Overall, their experiment documented significant improvements in the attitudes of Americans viewing the pro-China messages relative to a control condition. The effect varied, however, according to whether the

source of the message was clearly identified as the Chinese government, a pro-China NGO, or if the source was not identified at all.

Although all treatment conditions produced more positive evaluations of China relative to control, only the NGO source and the unattributed source conditions produced statistically significant improvements relative to the control condition. Given that these advertisements ran extensively on a large screen in Times Square in New York City and elsewhere, and in most cases the source was not identified directly, it seems likely they produced some of their intended effects.

Likewise, in an experimental investigation of another pro-China message, this time focused on the Chinese system of government, Fang (2015) examined the persuasive effects of a cartoon-based internet video ostensibly educating viewers about similarities and differences between the American and Chinese systems of government. Like Aldrich and colleagues, he documented statistically significant improvements relative to a control condition so long as the video was not directly and obviously attributed to the Communist Party of China. Those viewing the persuasive message without attribution or attributed to an Australian media company came to see the U.S. and Chinese systems of government as more similar as a result. This treatment video is currently posted online without any information about its source, thus suggesting its viewers may be influenced. Empirical evidence is obviously too limited at this point to draw any conclusions, but there are clearly empirical as well as theoretical reasons to believe that international persuasion is possible in the current communications environment.

Why Should Political Scientists Study International Political Persuasion?

Contrary to the old adage, selling politicians and political ideas is not the same as selling soap; the former is much more difficult. If we have learned anything from the long debate on whether campaigns matter and, if so, how much, it is that political persuasion is difficult.

Given that the marketplace of ideas is increasingly global, it stands to reason that political scientists should want to understand international persuasion if and when it occurs. Studying persuasion cross-nationally could also advance our theoretical understanding by examining the generalizability of our conclusions based on Americans, often college students.

More than any other discipline, political science already has taken experimentation – the preferred method for studying persuasion – outside the lab. Using both field experiments and survey experiments, political scientists already have focused on generalizability far more than social psychologists. Studying international persuasion takes advantage of political scientists' already considerable expertise in persuasion and combines it with greater knowledge of politics. As one diplomat described it (less than diplomatically), "The overseas communications programs of the U.S. government have always been, and remain today, a bureaucratic backwater..." (Lord 2006: p. ix; see also Kounalakis 2014; Chafets 2015).

A final advantage to the political science community for taking on this topic is to maintain relevance to the greater public and to public officials. Congressional efforts to cut funding for political science research repeatedly complain that political science research is not relevant to U.S. government efforts. Although a variety of efforts to address this concern have

been launched, showing is always more convincing than telling. Research on international persuasion helps keep political science highly relevant.

Conclusion

Political persuasion research has become disconnected from studies of international persuasion. Instead of drawing on the latest empirical methods and theoretical models available to political scientists, most research on international political persuasion has taken a case study approach that does not reveal precisely what worked and what did not. This state of affairs is ironic given that the modern study of attitudes and persuasion was fueled by academic research on wartime propaganda and troop morale.

Some may find the idea of political scientists doing research that is useful to the government to be distasteful and/or inappropriate. At the same time, most scholars would prefer persuasion to coercion and loss of life. The American public is already part of many government-sponsored field experiments. In September of 2015, President Obama authorized federal agencies to conduct behavioral experiments on U.S. citizens in order to advance government initiatives. His executive order encourages federal agencies to “develop strategies for applying behavioral science insights to programs and, where possible, rigorously test and evaluate the impact of these insights” (Executive Order, September 15, 2015). Agencies are further encouraged to develop relationships with researchers in order to “better use empirical findings from the behavioral sciences” (see also Fox and Tannenbaum 2015; Appelbaum 2015).

Those who see international persuasion as less than ethical must ask themselves, why is it acceptable to persuade domestic citizens but not those overseas? Is there or should there be protectionism in the international war of ideas? Should we apply different standards to information that flows out of our country than we do to the flow of information within it?

Although popular discourse often seeks to degrade persuasion by calling it propaganda or one of the “dark arts,” it is part and parcel of how democracies are supposed to work. To paraphrase Winston Churchill’s evaluation of democracy as a form of government, “Persuasion is the worst method of social control—except for all the others” (Encyclopædia Britannica 2015).

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