POPULAR LEADER AS AN ASSET OF SOFT POWER: THE RATINGS OF NATIONAL LEADERS AND THEIR COUNTRIES ABROAD

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ABSTRACT

The original concept of soft power embraced the belief that culture, values and foreign policy practice are the basic resources upon which this type power is based. This article argues that popular national leaders can also – maybe even more so – be treated as soft power resources as their popularity and trustworthiness go hand in hand with the positive public opinion about their countries abroad. This hypothesis is tested against survey data collected from all over the globe by the U.S.-based polling institute Pew Research Center over the last two decades. The data shows a strong positive correlation between the public confidence in a leader and the view of their country abroad in almost every case that was examined. The view of a country among foreign audiences often changes with the change of its top leadership. The results of this reseach cast doubt on whether national culture and values rather than national leaders are the preeminent source of soft power of any given country in international politics.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

Scholars of International Relations (IR) basically agree that a change in national leadership can change the direction of any country's foreign policy[1]. The underlying premise behind this, however, is that a new leader may choose different goals and ways while using the same national resources as the previous one; it is hardly imaginable that he or she may produce new resources. This line of thinking can partly be associated with the traditional conception of power in international politics as primarily based on material factors that are property of the state, not the individual[2]. With the advent of the concept of "soft power" to the IR disciplinary discourse, the understanding of what counts as power "resources" or "assets" broadened substantially, but there is still no general consensus of what soft power is based upon[3] and whether actors can be treated as "resources" themselves.

For the past several years, it has been a common practice to affirm that Donald Trump's Presidency has diminished the United State's central position within the global political order[4], or that Angela Merkel's personal political weight has elevated Germany to the leadership role in Europe[5]. However, the overall power position of any country is very hard to measure with scientific rigour, let alone prove that it has anything to do with the leader's personal input; the level of soft power is even more difficult to grasp unless the abstract concept itself is reduced to some measurable variables. Therefore such catchphrases as "Barack Obama is a soft power president"[6] are mostly intuitive and have yet to be tested in a scientific manner. The aim of this article is exactly that: to identify if there is any relationship between the international public confidence in any particular leader and the soft power potential (i.e., public assessment) of the whole country they run. With new leaders being elected or otherwise rising to the top ranks of their respective countries all over the world every year (by 2025 there will likely be a new leader in the U.S., UK, Japan, Canada, and several other countries), the need for such knowledge is ever pressing.

This research is based on descriptive statistics with data on variuos political leaders and countries drawn from Pew Research Center dataset; hence it is first and foremost a quantitative study as the number of cases (leader–country dyads) is quite high. A larger focus, however, is set on several of them – the U.S., China, Russia, Iran, Germany – simply due to more extensive data that is available. This is primarily an exploratory descriptive rather than a causal study.

There have already been some limited attempts to research the relationship between a political leader's persona and their country's international status employing the concept of soft power. Jonathan Knuckey and Myunghee Kim came closest to achieving a similar goal with their case study on the U.S. soft power during President Trump's

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1   For example, see: Charles Hermann, "Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 34, No. 1 (1990); Axel Dreher and Nathan Jensen, "Country or Leader? Political Change and UN General Assembly Voting," *European Journal of Political Economy* Vol. 29 (2013); Michaela Mattes, Brett Ashley Leeds and Royce Carroll, "Leadership Turnover and Foreign Policy Change: Societal Interests, Domestic Institutions, and Voting in the United Nations," *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 59, No. 2 (2015).

2   Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 131.

3   Peter Henne, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Soft Power," *International Studies Perspectives* Vol. 23, No. 1 (2022).

4   Doug Stokes, "Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order," *International Affairs* Vol. 94, No. 1 (2018).

5   Gisela Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, *Germany and the European Union: How Chancellor Angela Merkel Shaped Europe* (Cham: Springer, 2022).

6   Gideon Rachman, "Obama and the Limits of Soft Power," *Financial Times* (2 June 2009) // https://www.ft.com/content/e608b556-4ee0-11de-8c10-00144feabdc0.

term in office. They too based their arguments on survey data provided by Pew in its 2017 annual wave of polling and concluded that "to a large degree, the President of the U.S. shapes the image of the U.S. to other countries through the tone and content of his/her leadership in global affairs; <...> Trump's unilateral and divisive approaches damaged U.S. soft power and weakened confidence from the global society"[7]. Guy Golan and Sung-Un Yang investigated whether Barack Obama's Presidency at least partially mitigated anti-Americanism in Pakistan (based on the 2009 Pew survey in that country) and drew a similar conclusion: " assessments of a nation's leader [are] a key determinant of sentiments toward that nation"[8]. Benjamin Page and Tao Xie also used Pew data (from the 2007 wave of polling) when trying to identify what determined China's public image and its soft power potential in foreign countries; they concluded that it was macro-level factors – primarily the level of socio-economic development of the target audience – which facilitated a more positive view towards China[9]. None of the previous publications, however, went beyond a single case study (and usually a single survey in terms of data) to strive for a more systemic quantitative analysis. This is exactly what this article attempts to correct.

There were also some scientific inquiries into what determines the view of a country abroad that were based on experimental and quasi-experimental methodology[10]. For example, Meital Balmas conducted an experiment with Israeli and American participants on the way media representations of the leader affected people's attitudes towards their country (using real and fictional leaders and countries alike); he found that "a positive description of a national leader led participants [of the experiment] to express positive sentiment and high respect toward the leader's country, whereas a negative description prompted negative sentiment and low respect"[11]. It is all the more interesting to compare the results of such experiments with the real-world case studies based on quantitative surveys.

The article proceeds by reviewing the original account of soft power mostly associated with the writings of American political scientist Joseph Nye wherein positive public opinion around the globe is already implied to be a power resource. Nye's critics are also refered to in order to bring the concept up to date. The next section deals with the phenomenon called "personalization of politics" and its effects on the global view towards any given country; it winds up with a consequential hypothesis about a possible correlation between the national leader's public image and the external opinion about his/her country. After a short discussion about the methodological choices and the data used in this article it proceeds with the calculus of Pearson's correlation coefficients and survey data presented using bar charts and tables. All this statistical evidence leads to the concluding remarks in the final section.

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[7]   Myunghee Kim and Jonathan Knuckey, "Trump and US Soft Power," *Policy Studies* Vol. 42, No. 5-6 (2021): 684, 694.

[8]   Guy Golan and Sung-Un Yang, "Diplomat in Chief? Assessing the Influence of Presidential Evaluations on Public Diplomacy Outcomes Among Foreign Publics," *American Behavioral Scientist* Vol. 57, No. 9 (2013): 1289.

[9]   Tao Xie and Benjamin Page, "What Affects China's National Image? A Crossnational Study of Public Opinion," *Journal of Contemporary China* Vol. 22, No. 83 (2013).

[10]   Meital Balmas, "Tell Me Who Is Your Leader, and I Will Tell You Who You Are: Foreign Leaders' Perceived Personality and Public Attitudes toward Their Countries and Citizenry," *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 62, No. 2 (2018); Regina Bateson and Michael Weintraub, "The 2016 Election and America's Standing Abroad: Quasi-Experimental Evidence of a Trump Effect," *The Journal of Politics* Vol. 84, No. 4 (2022).

[11]   Meital Balmas, *supra* note 10, 511.

1. TRADITIONAL SOFT POWER RESOURCES IN WORLD POLITICS

Although within broader social theory "power" is a much more developed and debated concept[12], the academic (sub-)field of IR up until recent decade or two has been stuck with a relatively narrow understanding of power. Historical reviews of IR scholarship have concluded that even though the field generally subscribes to the Weberian definition of power as a relation between actors A and B, in which the former exercises her will over the latter, IR scholars have also been habitually inclined to reduce power to the resources that enable such relation; this was later named the "power" versus "power-as-resources" debate[13]. Because the concept of "soft power" was introduced in the 1990s and early 2000s[14] against the background of this decades long debate in the IR, the author who coined the term, Joseph S. Nye, initially only added to this conceptual ambiguity by putting high emphasis on resources. Nye defines "soft power" as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments <...> [i.e.] when you can get others to admire your ideals and to want what you want"[15]. In his first book-length elaboration of the concept, Nye introduced the idea of resources being almost definitive criteria on which type of power – hard or soft – is at play[16]. Whereas hard power resources tend to be more tangible and less idiosyncratic, like money, minerals or military force, so that actor A could "possess" them and essentially "exchange" (or theaten to exchange) them in relation to any actor B, soft power rests on A's own intrinsic model of society and past behaviour, and therefore is essentially based on the intangible; explicitly Nye lists[17] those as national "culture" (both pop and high), "values" (i.e., goals aspired both domestically and internationally), and "foreign policies" (record of behaviour towards the Others). Other scholars have accepted this list falling victim to the same "power-as-resources" fallacy when measuring various countries' soft power[18]. In his latest publication on the topic, Nye admits to having "used a behavioral definition of power, but trying to reconcile it with <...> a resource definition. [Critics] accurately pointed out that [resource] tangibility was not a defining criterion and [Nye] accepted that"[19]. A relation of voluntary subordination – what soft power is all about – can be facilitated by both tangible "possessions" and intangible "attributes" as long as there is no direct exchange of the former.

Power resources – even if they are not the same thing as power relations – are nonetheless very important to grasp and measure in analyzing the latter. Througout his numerous publications on the phenomenon, Nye explicitly implies that culture, values and policy conduct serve as sources of soft power only *if* and *where* they are attractive

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[12] For a good overview of this debate, see: Stewart Clegg and Mark Haugaard, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Power* (Los Angeles & London: Sage, 2009).

[13] Brian Schmidt, "Competing Realist Conceptions of Power," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* Vol. 33, No. 3 (2005); David A. Baldwin, "Power and International Relations": 274-275, 277-278; in: Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth Simmons, eds., *Handbook of International Relations*, 2nd edition (Los Angeles & London: Sage, 2013).

[14] Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Robert Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, "Power and Interdependence in the Information Age," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 77, No. 5 (1998); Joseph S. Nye, "Limits of American Power," *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 117, No. 4 (2002); Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

[15] Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), x.

[16] *Ibid.*, 7.

[17] *Ibid.*, 11; also Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 84.

[18] For example, see: Bates Gill and Yanzhong Huang, "Sources and Limits of Chinese 'Soft Power'," *Survival* Vol. 48, No. 2 (2006).

[19] Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power: The Evolution of a Concept," *Journal of Political Power* Vol. 14, No. 1 (2021): 200-201.

to and admired by others[20]. Even works critical of Nye's original account have essentially accepted his list of soft power resources. For example, Steven Rothman accurately points out that Nye did not bother to explain when culture or values of certain countries may become attractive to foreign audiences; according to Rothman, "in order for one country to be attracted to [another one's] culture, policy practices, or political ideals, they must be successful or benefit those in other countries. Even if we move beyond material needs, such as improvements in the economy or welfare, these policies must be attractive to others in the sense that it makes them feel good; <...> success in a particular culture or policy area increases the attractiveness of that policy or culture abroad"[21]. This still implies that the nation's culture and values as well as national policies are the primary sources of soft power.

When describing the workings of soft power, Nye presents two causal models.[22] In the first, which he calls the direct effect model, the key decision-makers in a foreign country are so in love with your country's culture and values, and perceive your policies as so "right" and legitimate that they themselves inadvertently adjust their country's policy course to fit your national interests. According to the second (the indirect effect model), if a foreign society, i.e., the general public of a foreign country admires and feels close to your culture, values and policies, over time it will put enough pressure and pass this feeling on to the ruling elites so much so that their government will feel obliged to follow your country's interests in international affairs. By that logic, the favourable view of your country by a foreign public – whether caused by your country's cultural apeal or any other reason – is ultimately the intermediate "resource" that generates soft power relations between that foreign country and your own. Some critics have discounted Nye's "two-step" model simply because "public opinion does not make foreign policy, the state's central decision makers do, and there is little reason to believe that public opinion affects their calculations"[23]. In his later works, even Nye himself is careful not to overrate opinion polls as an accurate method to measure soft power: "even though polls can measure the existence and trends in potential soft power resources, they are only a first approximation for behavioral change in terms of outcomes"[24] which can only be inferred by thorough process-tracing in isolated cases.

If, however, we accept that public opinion about a particular country among foreign audiencies is an important indicator of that country's soft power potential (not its actuality), it is worth analyzing what causes the variations in public opinion abroad, and whether Nye was right about the preeminent effects of national culture and values.

2. PERSONALIZATION OF POLITICS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL LEADERS

In recent decades the subfileds of comparative politics and political communication saw a growing body of literature on the so called "personalization of politics"[25]. This label

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[20] Joseph S. Nye, *supra* note 12, 12; also Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power and Public Diplomacy Revisited," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* Vol. 14, No. 1-2 (2019): 8.

[21] Steven Rothman, "Revising the Soft Power Concept: What are the Means and Mechanisms of Soft Power?," *Journal of Political Power* Vol. 4, No. 1 (2011): 56-57.

[22] Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 94-95.

[23] Christopher Layne, "The Unbearable Lightness of Soft Power": 56; in: Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox, eds., *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[24] Joseph S. Nye, *supra* note 21, 95.

[25] Ian McAllister, "The Personalization of Politics": 571-588; in: Russell Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Diego Garzia, *Personalization of Politics and Electoral Change* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Diego Garzia,

covers a broad range of empirical phenomena that are related to one another in one particular feature: "the political weight of the individual actor in the political process increases over time, while the centrality of the political group <...> declines"[26]. One strand of scholarship focuses on the personalization of political process – especially the election campains – in the media, where stories of individual politicians arguably receive more coverage and higher viewership/readership than the government institutions or the parties they represent[27] to the extent that it affects the election results[28]. The other strand of academic literature investigates the intra-institutional and intra-party dynamics of power struggle to suggest that individual leaders are becoming more autonomous and more powerful at the expense of their respective collectivities, whether it is the cabinet or the party[29]. However, all (or almost all) of the existing studies in the area of personalization of politics have remained firmly committed to the national political contexts of various countries.

Israeli scholars Meital Balmas and Tamir Sheafer are likely to be the first to raise some modest questions on how the personalization of politics in the twenty-first century affects international relations across state borders[30]. As they put it, "if national leaders are granted more power by their respective countries' national political institutions, they will probably be perceived as more powerful by international political actors as well. As a result, it is the leaders who will become a preferred target of foreign countries' media coverage"[31]. The factors behind increased media focus on national leaders compared to their respective countries was the subject of Balmas and Sheafer's own research[32]. They did not investigate how fundamental changes in media coverage affected public attitudes towards those leaders or those countries abroad. However, as it was established in the preceding section, public opinion among foreign audiences may be the best (if imperfect) indicator of soft power potential of any given country. If individual leaders are increasingly overshadowing their parties and other collective bodies in the national political context, the leader's image may also bear a direct effect on how his whole country is perceived internationally. Stemming from the "personalization of politics" thesis in the contiguous academic fields, this article puts forth a somewhat novel hypothesis about the sources of soft power that dissents from IR orthodoxy: *the more the leader of a country is trusted and valued among foreign audiences, the more*

"The Rise of Party/Leader Identification in Western Europe," *Political Research Quarterly* Vol. 66, No. 3 (2013); Gideon Rahat and Tamir Sheafer, "The Personalization(s) of Politics: Israel, 1949–2003," *Political Communication* Vol. 24, No. 1 (2007).

[26]　Gideon Rahat and Tamir Sheafer, *supra* note 20, 65.

[27]　Christina Holtz-Bacha, Ana Ines Langer and Susanne Merkle, "The Personalization of Politics in Comparative Perspective: Campaign Coverage in Germany and the United Kingdom," *European Journal of Communication* Vol. 29, No. 2 (2014); Hanspeter Kriesi, "Personalization of National Election Campaigns," *Party Politics* Vol. 18, No. 6 (2012); Rens Vliegenthart, Hajo Boomgaarden and Jelle Boumans, "Changes in Political News Coverage: Personalization, Conflict and Negativity in British and Dutch Newspapers": 92-110; in: Kees Brants and Katrin Voltmer, eds., *Political Communication in Postmodern Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[28]　Anthony King, ed., *Leaders' Personalities and the Outcomes of Democratic Elections* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Patrício Costa and Frederico Ferreira da Silva, "The Impact of Voter Evaluations of Leaders' Traits on Voting Behaviour: Evidence from Seven European Countries," *West European Politics* Vol. 38, No. 6 (2015).

[29]　Thomas Poguntke and Paul Webb, eds., *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democraciess* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Meital Balmas *et al.*, "Two Routes to Personalized Politics: Centralized and Decentralized Personalization," *Party Politics* Vol. 20, No. 1 (2014).

[30]　Meital Balmas and Tamir Sheafer, "Leaders First, Countries After: Mediated Political Personalization in the International Arena," *Journal of Communication* Vol. 63, No. 3 (2013); Meital Balmas and Tamir Sheafer, "Charismatic Leaders and Mediated Personalization in the International Arena," *Communication Research* Vol. 41, No. 7 (2014).

[31]　Meital Balmas and Tamir Sheafer, "Leaders First, Countries After: Mediated Political Personalization in the International Arena," *Journal of Communication* Vol. 63, No. 3 (2013): 457.

[32]　Meital Balmas and Tamir Sheafer, *supra* note 26.

favourably that country is viewed abroad. It falls short of claiming that trustworthy leaders somehow automatically create soft power relations between countries, but it implies that the leader's persona (or her public image abroad) is the original "resource" that allows for such power relations to occur.

3. METHODOLOGY

The emprical evidence for testing the hypothesis stated above is provided by probably the most comprehensive multinational public opinion dataset accumulated by the U.S.-based non-profit polling institute Pew Research Center[33]. Each year since the early 2000s (usually in spring) Pew carries out its Global Attitudes survey in multiple countries on the most pressing sociopolitical issues that usually (although not necessarily) have some policy implications for the U.S. government. The sample (usually around 1000 to 2000 respondents) in each country is representative of its entire population and the polls are taken around the same time (usually in a span of two months) in each of them. These annual polls include some questions that are repetetive and allow not only for a cross-country but also for a longitudinal comparison of some data. The countries included in these annual waves of polling, however, are not always the same which creates some problems for any scholar trying to use this data for her own original research. Some questions are asked in some countries, but not in others. Nonetheless for the purposes of this research Pew Global Attitudes surveys are the most suitable source of data.

To check whether there is any statistical relation between the public confidence in a national leader and the view of their country abroad, Pew offers a ready-made (if imperfect) instrument. The overall attitude towards various countries are evaluated by asking a simple question "do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of [country name]?" In addition to occasional questions about the leaders' concrete deeds and policy programmes, the national leaders are also given an overall evaluation with reference to the level of confidence they elicit: "how much confidence do you have in [leader's name] to do the right thing regarding world affairs?" Admittedly, a positive answer to this question (a lot of/some confidence) does not indicate that the respondent admires or even likes that particular leader as a person, only that he or she trusts them enough to act favourably when it comes to matters of international importance. Incidentally, in the Spring 2011 survey Pew pollsters asked the public in 23 countries, what was "most appealing" to them about the U.S. President Barack Obama – "his personal qualities, his policies, both, or neither"; the majority of respondents in 21 of the 23 countries chose either "both" or "neither" which shows that the public hardly separates the man from the deed. Sometimes (and only of some national leaders) Pew also asks the more straight-forward question "do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of [leader's name]?" For the purpose of this research these two questions about national leaders will be treated interchangably even though they have slightly different connotations.

A few major countries – the U.S., China, Russia, to an extent also Germany – as well as their top leaders are regularly featured in Pew Global Attitudes questionnaires. Other countries and/or leaders are added only occasionally. Only the results of polls

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[33] Datasets, Pew Research Center website // https://www.pewresearch.org/global/datasets/.

that included both the above mentioned question about the leader and the question about his country could be used for this particular research. The most extensive Pew data in terms of proper questionnaires used and the number of foreign countries polled exists for the U.S., China, Russia, Iran, and Germany; these countries can therefore be singled out as case studies, even though some data on other countries (even relatively small ones such as Israel and Cuba) is also available.

Pew pollsters often give the above mentioned questions about a country and its leader to the people of that very country, but in the context of soft power research, it is not logical to take into account how, for example, the Americans or the Russians view their own country or their own president; only foreign audiences are relevant. Therefore the polling results regarding the country in question collected in the country itself are always excluded from the sample used in this research.

When it comes to the answers to the two main questions used for this reasearch, Pew questionnaires provide a multiple choice to the respondent which essentially translates into an even Likert scale (it is even, because the fifth option in the multiple choice is an altogether refusal to answer). It is therefore logical to calculate the net result for each poll (e.g., the percentage number of respondents who said they had "not too much" or "no confidence at all" in the leader in question is subtracted from the combined percentage of those who claimed to have "a lot" or "some confidence"). In the following sections only net results of all the polls are used for calculating the avarage ratings and the Pearson's correlation coefficients.

The last methodological conundrum concerns the question of which individuals should actually be considered the real "leaders" of their respective countries. This question poses less of a puzzle in cases of consolidated democracies where the elected chief executives are usually at the top of both the formal and the informal hierarchy. Things are more complicated in various hybrid and authoritarian regimes as the formally leading officials are not necessarily the ones who are actually running things. There may be some peculiar power-sharing arrangements like the one between the President and the Supreme Leader in Iran[34], or the President and the Prime Minister in Russia during Medvedev's term in office[35]. However, the logic of this research does not really require to take into account the complexities of each political system because the global audience outside the country in question would hardly do that either. The person occupying the top office in any country is in most cases perceived as its "leader" by the foreign populations as they are rarely familiar with the intricacies of other countries' constitutional arrangements and domestic politics. If the hypothesis proposed in the above section is correct, international confidence in the top official will go hand in hand with the favourable view of the country no matter how much substantial power that official actually wields in that country.

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[34] Houchang E. Chehabi, "The Political Regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Comparative Perspective," *Government and Opposition* Vol. 36, No. 1 (2001): 65-69; Pejman Abdolmohammadi and Giampiero Cama, "Iran as a Peculiar Hybrid Regime: Structure and Dynamics of the Islamic Republic," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 42, No. 4 (2015).

[35] Joseph Laurence Black, *The Russian Presidency of Dmitry Medvedev, 2008-12: The Next Step Forward or Merely a Time-Out?* (London & New York: Routledge, 2015); Andrew Monaghan, "The Vertikal: Power and Authority in Russia," *International Affairs* Vol. 88, No. 1 (2012).

4. CORRELATION BETWEEN THE LEADER'S AND THE COUNTRY'S RATINGS ABROAD

Tables 1 to 8 show the statistical relationship between the net confidence in a leader and the net view of their country abroad by year of the survey. Five countries – the U.S., China, Russia, Iran and Germany – and their leaders have been sufficiency covered by Pew questionnaires for at least 8-9 years (the U.S. and the U.S. President are actually featured in almost every survey since 2002). In terms of both country and leader rating polls, France and Japan have only been covered in 3 and 4 annual waves of polling respectively. However, as correlation coefficients here are calculated for each year (each survey) separately, it does not really matter how many surveys were taken on each case; more important is the number of foreign countries in which surveys were carried out. Unfortunatelly, only questions about the American, Chinese and Russian leaders together with questions about the U.S., China and Russia as countries are regularly asked worldwide, i.e. in every region and at least 20 to 40 foreign countries in total. Most leaders and/or countries are subjected for evaluation only in countries of their own region. If the number of foreign countries polled is too small (usually if N < 5) there is simply too little data for Pearson's coefficient to be calculated.

For almost every case and every annual wave of polling, the correlation between the net confidence in a leader and the net view of their country abroad proved to be *statistically significant*. In fact, the few instances where there was no statistically significant relationship between the two indicators (Biden + the U.S. in 2021, Merkel + Germany in 2007 and 2010, Chavez + Venezuela in 2007, Netanyahu + Israel in 2013, Castro + Cuba in 2015 and 2017) can reasonably be blamed on the relatively small number of foreign countries polled (N ≤ 16); if N > 25, the Pearson's R is at least 0.7 (or higher), and is always statistically significant.

Table 1. Relationship between the international confidence in the President of the United States and the view of his country, the United States (by year)

Q (leader): tell me how much confidence you have in U.S. President George W. Bush / Barack Obama / Donald Trump / Joe Biden to do the right thing regarding world affairs – a lot of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all?						
Q (country): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of the United States?						
Year of survey	President of the U.S. at the time of polling	No. of countries polled	Average net confidence in the president	Average net view of the U.S.	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Statistical significance (at p < .05)
2022	Joe Biden	N = 18*	+16.5%	+29.6%	r = 0.69	significant
2021	Joe Biden	N = 16*	+51.2%	+24.0%	r = -0.16	(!) not significant
2019	Donald Trump	N = 32	-25.3%	+17.4%	r = 0.84	significant
2017	Donald Trump	N = 37	-37.2%	+9.0%	r = 0.71	significant
2015	Barack Obama	N = 39	+27.5%	+34.8%	r = 0.88	significant
2013	Barack Obama	N = 38	+16.9%	+22.9%	r = 0.79	significant
2012	Barack Obama	N = 20	+9.2%	+3.4%	r = 0.81	significant
2011	Barack Obama	N = 22	+11.6%	+11.5%	r = 0.87	significant
2009	Barack Obama	N = 24	+36.0%	+17.5%	r = 0.97	significant
2008	George W. Bush	N = 23	-44.5%	-4.2%	r = 0.80	significant
2007	George W. Bush	N = 46	-33.8%	+3.8%	r = 0.88	significant

* only developed / developing economies in Europe, East and Southeast Asia, plus Canada and Israel.

Table 2. Relationship between the international confidence in the President of China and the view of his country, China

Q (leader): tell me how much confidence you have in Chinese President Hu Jintao / Xi Jinping to do the right thing regarding world affairs – a lot of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all? Q (country): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of China?						
Year of survey	President of China at the time of polling	No. of countries polled	Average net confidence in the president	Average net view of China	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Statistical significance (at p < .05)
2022	Xi Jinping	N = 18**	-47.9%	-33.9%	r = 0.89	significant
2021	Xi Jinping	N = 16**	-49.6%	-36.9%	r = 0.89	significant
2020	Xi Jinping	N = 14**	-58.6%	-50.5%	r = 0.62	significant
2019	Xi Jinping	N = 34	-12.9%	+1.2%	r = 0.75	significant
2017	Xi Jinping	N = 37	-18.2%	+9.1%	r = 0.68	significant
2015	Xi Jinping	N = 9*	+7.0%	+12.6%	r = 0.96	significant
2014	Xi Jinping	N = 43	-11.7%	+13.6%	r = 0.79	significant
2007	Hu Jintao	N = 46	-4.7%	+21.2%	r = 0.90	significant

* only countries in Asia-Pacific.

** only developed / developing economies in Europe, East and Southeast Asia, plus Canada, the U.S. and Israel.

Table 3. Relationship between the international confidence in the President of Russia and the view of his country, Russia

Q (leader): tell me how much confidence you have in Russian President Vladimir Putin / Dmitri Medvedev to do the right thing regarding world affairs – a lot of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all? Q (country): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of Russia?						
Year of survey	President of Russia at the time of polling	No. of countries polled	Average net confidence in the president	Average net view of Russia	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Statistical significance (at p < .05)
2022	Vladimir Putin	N = 18*	-70.6%	-67.9%	r = 0.96	significant
2019	Vladimir Putin	N = 33	-22.7%	-10.1%	r = 0.87	significant
2017	Vladimir Putin	N = 37	-28.8%	-9.9%	r = 0.88	significant
2014	Vladimir Putin	N = 43	-26.1%	-12.8%	r = 0.92	significant
2012	Vladimir Putin	N = 20	-40.4%	-18.5%	r = 0.67	significant
2011	Dmitri Medvedev	N = 20	-25.3%	-5.3%	r = 0.79	significant
2010	Dmitri Medvedev	N = 21	-20.3%	-4.1%	r = 0.74	significant
2009	Dmitri Medvedev	N = 24	-28.5%	-8.3%	r = 0.61	significant
2007	Vladimir Putin	N = 46	-23.4%	+3.0%	r = 0.82	significant

* only developed / developing economies in Europe, East and Southeast Asia, plus Canada and Israel.

Table 4. Relationship between the international image of / confidence in the President of Iran and the view of his country, Iran

Q (leader, 2006-2011): tell me how much confidence you have in Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to do the right thing regarding world affairs – a lot of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all? *Q* (leader, 2012-2017): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad / Hassan Rouhani? *Q* (country): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of Iran?						
Year of survey	President of Iran at the time of polling	No. of countries polled	Average net confidence in the president	Average net view of Iran	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Statistical significance (at p < .05)
2017	Hassan Rouhani	N = 5*	-50.4%	-54.6%	r = 0.96	significant
2015	Hassan Rouhani	N = 5*	-46.6%	-51.0%	r = 0.99	significant
2014	Hassan Rouhani	N = 7*	-50.0%	-50.1%	r = 0.95	significant
2012	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	N = 6*	-16.2%	-17.0%	r = 0.94	significant
2011	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	N = 8*	-30.4%	-18.9%	r = 0.99	significant
2010	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	N = 7*	-15.9%	-1.4%	r = 0.93	significant
2009	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	N = 9*	-25.2%	-12.9%	r = 0.95	significant
2007	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	N = 47	-37.9%	-24.4%	r = 0.92	significant
2006	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	N = 11	-32.5%	-0.9%	r = 0.87	significant

* only Muslim countries in the Middle East and Asia-Pacific, plus Israel.

Table 5. Relationship between the international confidence in the Chancellor of Germany and the view of her country, Germany

Q (leader): tell me how much confidence you have in German Chancellor Angela Merkel to do the right thing regarding world affairs – a lot of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all? *Q* (country): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of Germany?						
Year of survey	Chancellor of Germany at the time of polling	No. of countries polled	Average net confidence in the chancellor	Average net view of Germany	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Statistical significance (at p < .05)
2021	Angela Merkel	N = 15**	+54.9%	+56.1%	r = 0.96	significant
2019	Angela Merkel	N = 15*	+13.4%	+44.1%	r = 0.88	significant
2017	Angela Merkel	N = 9*	+22.8%	+46.0%	r = 0.91	significant
2012	Angela Merkel	N = 7*	+6.4%	+40.4%	r = 0.97	significant
2011	Angela Merkel	N = 7*	+35.9%	+69.0%	r = 0.92	significant
2010	Angela Merkel	N = 5*	+34.8%	+66.6%	r = 0.77	(!) not significant
2007	Angela Merkel	N = 12*	+32.5%	+61.5%	r = 0.45	(!) not significant
2006	Angela Merkel	N = 6	+10.3%	+52.5%	r = 0.95	significant

* only countries in Europe (plus the U.S. in 2007).

** only developed / developing economies in Europe, East and Southeast Asia, plus Canada.

Table 6. Relationship between the international confidence in the President of France and the view of his country, France

Q (leader): tell me how much confidence you have in French President Jacques Chirac / Nicolas Sarkozy to do the right thing regarding world affairs – a lot of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all?						
Q (country): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of France?						
Year of survey	President of France at the time of polling	No. of countries polled	Average net confidence in the president	Average net view of France	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Statistical significance (at p < .05)
2012	Nicolas Sarkozy	N = 7*	-20.1%	+39.3%	r = 0.87	significant
2006	Jacques Chirac	N = 14	-5.4%	+23.2%	r = 0.73	significant
2005	Jacques Chirac	N = 10	+1.2%	+34.3%	r = 0.73	significant

* only countries in Europe.

Table 7. Relationship between the international image of / confidence in the Prime Minister of Japan and the view of his country, Japan

Q (leader, 2007, 2014-2015): tell me how much confidence you have in Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to do the right thing regarding world affairs – a lot of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all?						
Q (leader, 2013): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe?						
Q (country): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of Japan?						
Year of survey	Prime Minister of Japan at the time of polling	No. of countries polled	Average net confidence in Prime Minister	Average net view of Japan	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Statistical significance (at p < .05)
2015	Shinzo Abe	N = 9*	+14.4%	+32.4%	r = 0.95	significant
2014	Shinzo Abe	N = 11*	+8.3%	+32.4%	r = 0.93	significant
2013	Shinzo Abe	N = 7*	0%	+23.7%	r = 0.97	significant
2007	Shinzo Abe	N = 6*	+0.7%	+24.8%	r = 0.93	significant

* only countries in Asia-Pacific (plus the U.S. in 2014).

Table 8. Relationship between the international image of / confidence in various leaders and the view of their countries

Q (leader, 2007-2012, 2015-2017): tell me how much confidence you have in [each leader] to do the right thing regarding world affairs – a lot of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all?						
Q (leader, 2013): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of [leader's name]?						
Q (country): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of [country's name]?						
Year of survey	Leader (country)	No. of countries polled	Average net confidence in the leader	Average net view of the country	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Statistical significance (at p < .05)
2017	Raul Castro (Cuba)	N = 7*	-47.4%	-7.1%	r = 0.65	(!) not significant
2015	Narendra Modi (India)	N = 9*	+3.0%	+11.2%	r = 0.92	significant
	Raul Castro (Cuba)	N = 6*	-39.5%	-9.3%	r = 0.65	(!) not significant

2013	Benjamin Netanyahu (Israel)	N = 6*	-87.5%	-89.2%	r = 0.76	(!) not significant
	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Turkey)	N = 6*	+20.2%	+21.2%	r = 0.97	significant
2012	David Cameron (United Kingdom)	N = 7*	-7.0%	+44.0%	r = 0.96	significant
2011	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Turkey)	N = 15	-6.2%	+21.7%	r = 0.75	significant
2007	Thabo Mbeki (South Africa)	N = 9*	+53.7%	+61.8%	r = 0.69	significant
	Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Brazil)	N = 6*	+9.8%	+44.3%	r = 0.84	significant
	Hugo Chavez (Venezuela)	N = 6*	-41.8%	+4.0%	r = 0.65	(!) not significant

* only countries in their respective regions (Latin America for Cuba, Brazil and Venezuela, Asia-Pacific for India, Middle East for Turkey in 2013 and Israel, Europe for UK, Africa for South Africa).

There is another way to calculate the correlation coefficient with the same data at hand. Rather than calculating it for every case (country + its leader) by year (wave of polling), one could also calculate it for every case by audience if the number of polling waves is high enough. As previously mentioned, the U.S. as a country and the U.S. President were featured together in Pew questionnaires on at least 18 separate surveys from 2002 to 2022. This allows to check whether there is any statistical relation between the confidence in the President and the image of the U.S. in the same foreign audience across timeline. Table 9 shows that in fact there is significant *positive* correlation in most foreign countries (with the drop / grow of the President's rating, the U.S. rating also drops / grows correspondingly), except for Pakistan, Israel and Jordan.

Table 9. Relationship between the international confidence in the President of the United States and the view of his country, the United States (by audience)

Q (leader): tell me how much confidence you have in U.S. President George W. Bush / Barack Obama / Donald Trump / Joe Biden to do the right thing regarding world affairs – a lot of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all?					
Q (country): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of the United States?					
Country polled	No. of annual surveys	Year (president) when the U.S. was viewed best	Year (president) when the U.S. was viewed worst	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Statistical significance (at p < .05)
Canada	N = 12	2015 (Obama)	2020 (Trump)	r = 0.88	significant
France	N = 18	2014 (Obama)	2020 (Trump)	r = 0.96	significant
Germany	N = 18	2009 (Obama)	2020 (Trump)	r = 0.93	significant
Italy	N = 12	2015 (Obama)	2020 (Trump)	r = 0.93	significant
Poland	N = 14	2022 (Biden)	2007 (Bush)	r = 0.60	significant
Russia	N = 14	2010 (Obama)	2015 (Obama)	r = 0.72	significant
Sweden	N = 7	2016 (Obama)	2020 (Trump)	r = 0.88	significant
Spain	N = 18	2015 (Obama)	2006 (Bush)	r = 0.92	significant
United Kingdom	N = 18	2009 (Obama)	2020 (Trump)	r = 0.82	significant
Australia	N = 9	2013 (Obama)	2020 (Trump)	r = 0.79	significant
China	N = 11	2010 (Obama)	2007 (Bush)	r = 0.73	significant
India	N = 13	2015 (Obama)	2006 (Bush)	r = 0.68	significant
Indonesia	N = 13	2015 (Obama)	2003 (Bush)	r = 0.94	significant
Japan	N = 16	2011 (Obama)	2020 (Trump)	r = 0.70	significant

Pakistan	N = 12	2006 (Bush)	2003 (Bush), 2012 (Obama)	r = 0.29	(!) not significant
South Korea	N = 13	2022 (Biden)	2003 (Bush)	r = 0.71	significant
Israel	N = 10	2019 (Trump)	2011 (Obama)	r = 0.39	(!) not significant
Jordan	N = 13	2009 (Obama)	2003 (Bush)	r = 0.37	(!) not significant
Lebanon	N = 13	2009 (Obama)	2003 (Bush)	r = 0.88	significant
Turkey	N = 14	2015 (Obama)	2007 (Bush)	r = 0.71	significant
Argentina	N = 9	2019 (Trump)	2007 (Bush)	r = 0.73	significant
Brazil	N = 12	2015 (Obama)	2003 (Bush)	r = 0.81	significant
Mexico	N = 11	2009 (Obama)	2017 (Trump)	r = 0.95	significant
Kenya	N = 10	2010 (Obama)	2017 (Trump)	r = 0.80	significant
Nigeria	N = 12	2010 (Obama)	2003 (Bush)	r = 0.89	significant
South Africa	N = 8	2015 (Obama)	2019 (Trump)	r = 0.78	significant

Since the number of leader–country dyads (the "N") is not very high neither presented by year of polling nor by respondent countries (audience), the search for linearity of the relationship is best carried out by pooling the data of all the years and all the audiences polled over those years. The linearity of the trendline for the U.S., Russia, China and Germany is visible in figures 1 to 4.
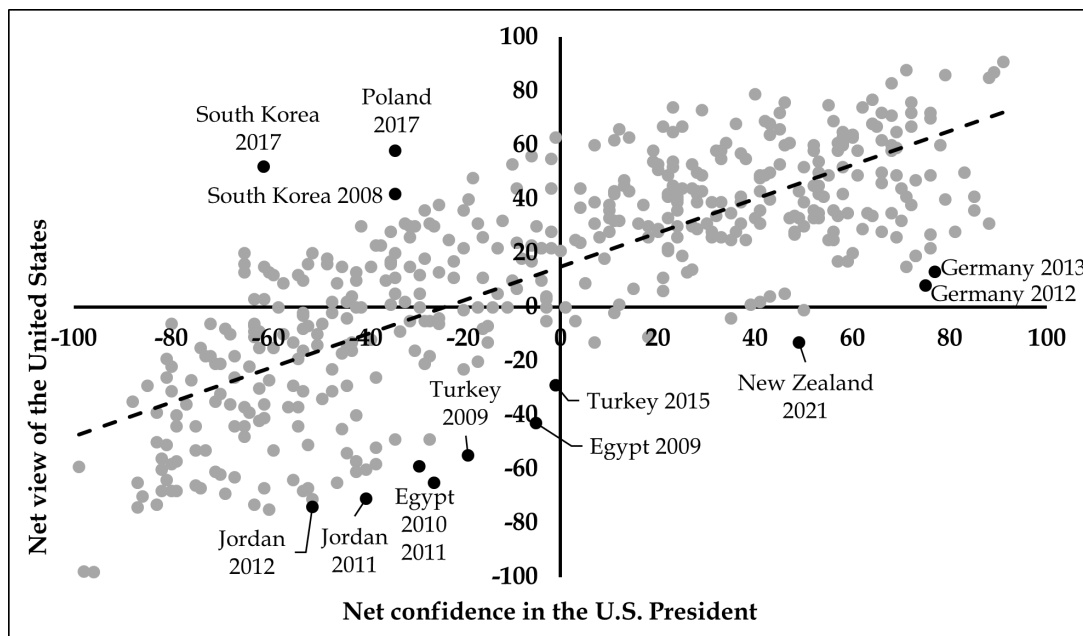

Figure 1. Net confidence in the U.S. President and net view of the U.S.*

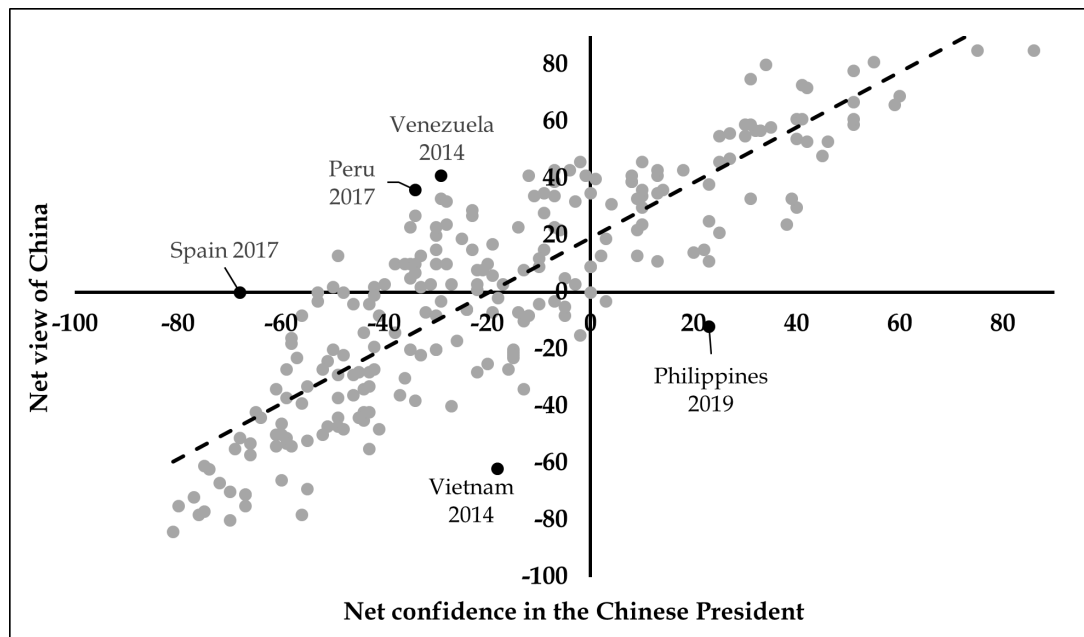* N = 455 (from 18 annual waves of polling), r = 0.79 (significant at p < 0.01).

Figure 2. Net confidence in the Chinese President and net view of China*

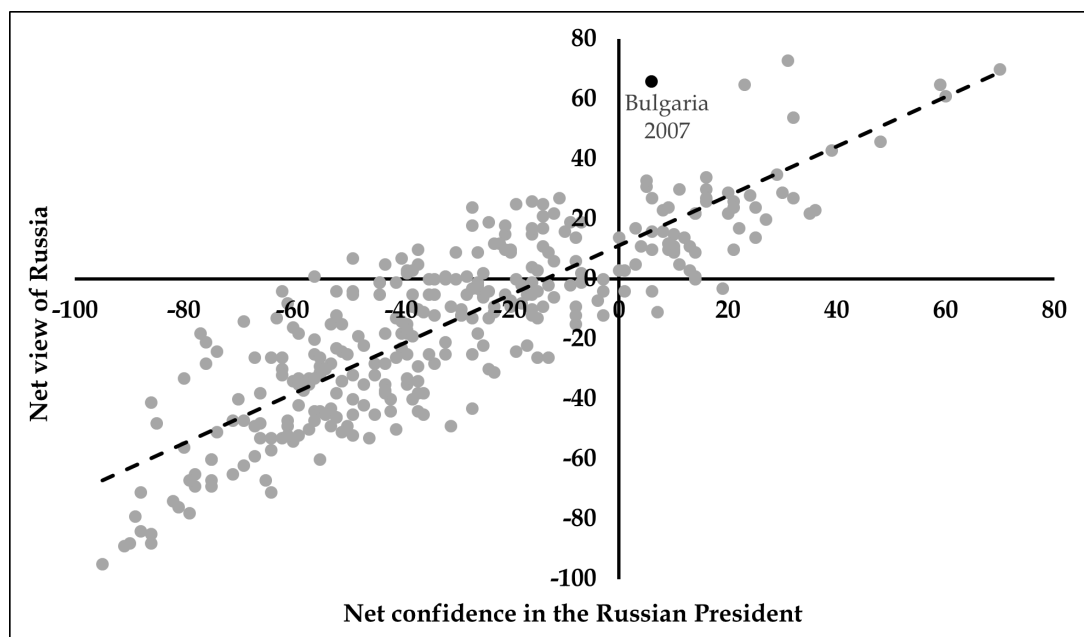* N = 231 (from 12 annual waves of polling), r = 0.86 (significant at p < 0.01).

Figure 3. Net confidence in the Russian President and net view of Russia*

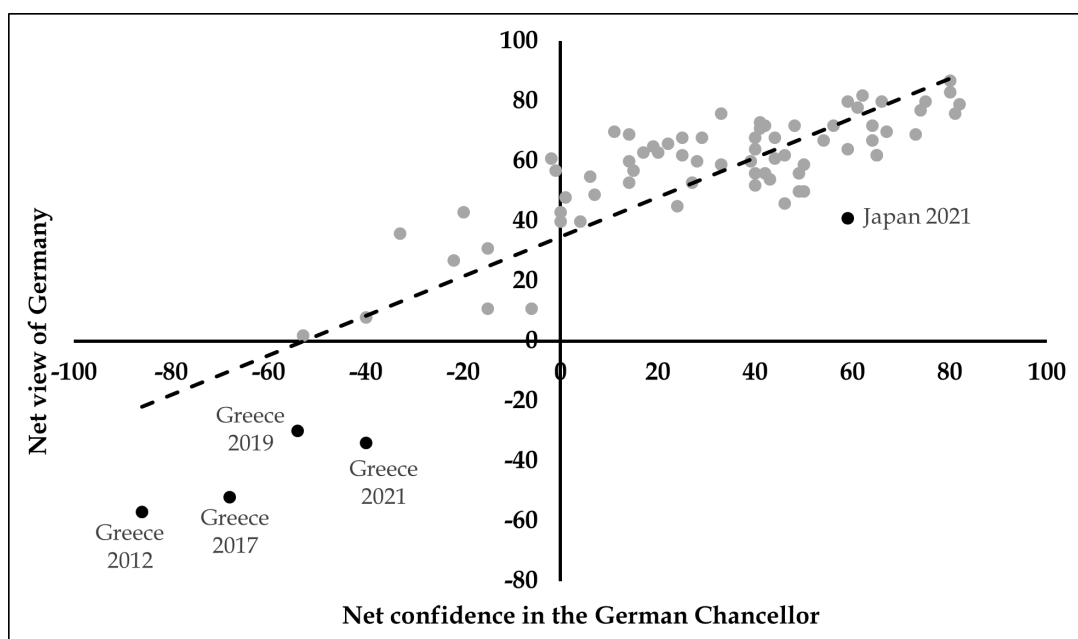* N = 315 (from 11 annual waves of polling), r = 0.85 (significant at p < 0.01).

Figure 4. Net confidence in the German Chancellor and net view of Germany*

* N = 76 (from 8 annual waves of polling), r = 0.85 (significant at p < 0.01).

Pooling the data also helps to identify possible outliers in the scatter plots. For example, in the U.S. case, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, (surprisingly) Germany, and New Zealand, are potential outliers (mostly because the U.S. favourability rating did not grow there under Obama and Biden as much as it did in most other countries); South Korea is also a candidate to be treated as an outlier as the net view of the U.S. remained highly possitive (and did not fluctuate that much) under unpopular presidents (Bush and Trump). In the case of Germany, Greece stands out as a possible outlier: both Angela Merkel and the *Bundesrepublik* consistently received negative scores by the Greeks visually departing from the general trendline, although this may only indicate that the correlation is *not* perfectly linear. However, there are no compelling arguments for removing the outliers from the dataset.

5. CASE STUDIES: COUNTRIES' RATINGS UNDER DIFFERENT LEADERS

Correlation coefficients for each leader–country dyad could be calculated using various samples from different annual surveys (depending on the scope of each survey in terms of foreign countries polled). Quite another thing is to study the polling results from a defined sample of respondent countries – as representative as possible – across many annual surveys to unveil the actual change in worldwide popularity of any one country over time and under different leaders. For this exercise, only one survey question is relevant: "do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of [country name]?" Bearing in mind the occasionally wide but still limited scope of Pew surveys, it is not easy to form a sample of foreign audiences that would be representative of the 'global public opinion'. Pew surveys are carried out on a national level for each country separately, so a representative sample would probably include ~22% of states from Asia-Pacific, ~13% from Western Europe, ~12% from Eastern Europe, ~24% from Africa, ~11% from the Middle East, and ~18% from Latin America and the Caribbean as those are the shares each region has within the

global pool of sovereign states (nowadays ~200 in total). On the other hand, in terms of their share in global population, the Western European states should comprise only ~5-6% of the sample, Eastern European – ~4%, North American (U.S. + Canada) – ~5%, Middle Eastern – ~7%, Latin America and the Caribbean – ~8%, African – ~14-15%, whereas the Asian-Pacific countries should comprise the lion's share – ~57% of the sample. Because Pew has never strived for such "representativeness" (e.g., rarely commissioned surveys in African countries compared to European ones), the following samples are not perfectly representative, but nonetheless include countries from every region of the world.
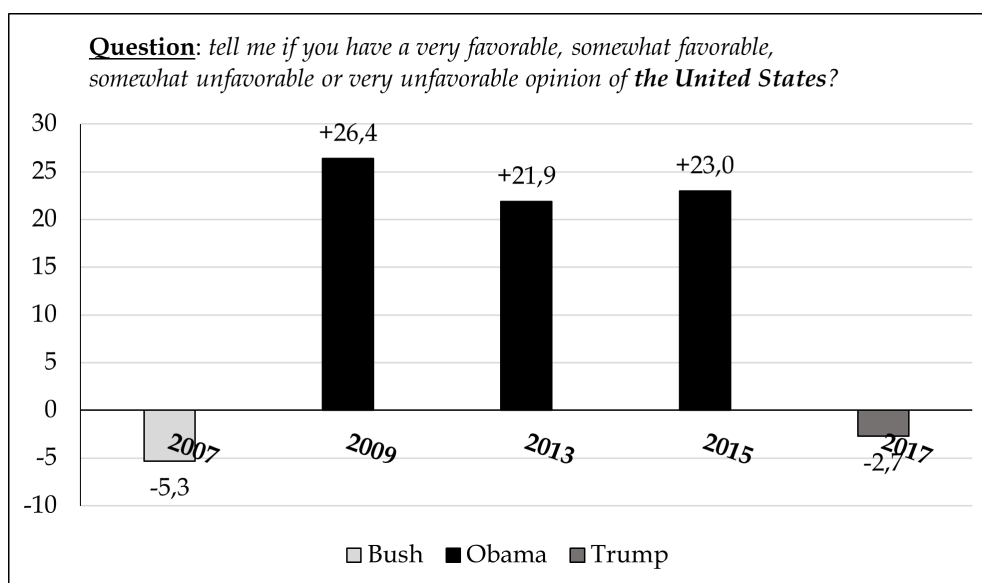

Figure 5. Average net view of the United States in 18 selected* foreign countries by year

* the sample includes: 4 countries in Western Europe, 2 in Eastern Europe, 1 in North America, 3 in the Middle East, 3 in Asia-Pacific, 3 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2 in Africa.
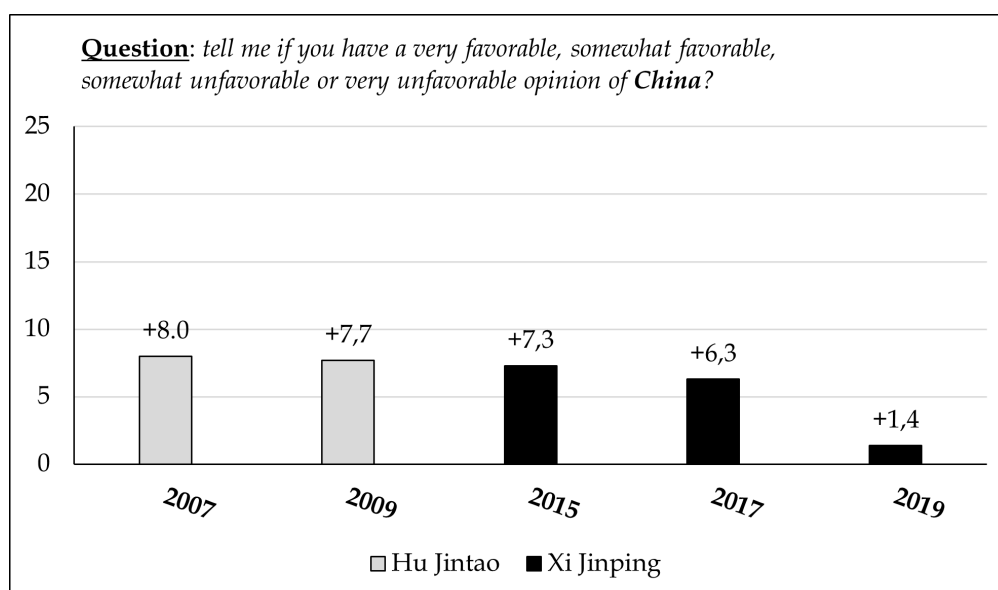

Figure 6. Average net view of China in 20 selected* foreign countries by year

* the sample includes: 4 countries in Western Europe, 2 in Eastern Europe, 2 in North America, 3 in the Middle East, 4 in Asia-Pacific, 3 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2 in Africa.

Figure 7. Average net view of Russia in 18 selected* foreign countries by year

* the sample includes: 4 countries in Western Europe, 1 in Eastern Europe, 1 in North America, 3 in the Middle East, 4 in Asia-Pacific, 3 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2 in Africa.

Figure 8. Average net view of Iran in 18 selected* foreign countries by year

* the sample includes: 4 countries in Western Europe, 2 in Eastern Europe, 1 in North America, 3 in the Middle East, 5 in Asia-Pacific, 2 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1 in Africa.
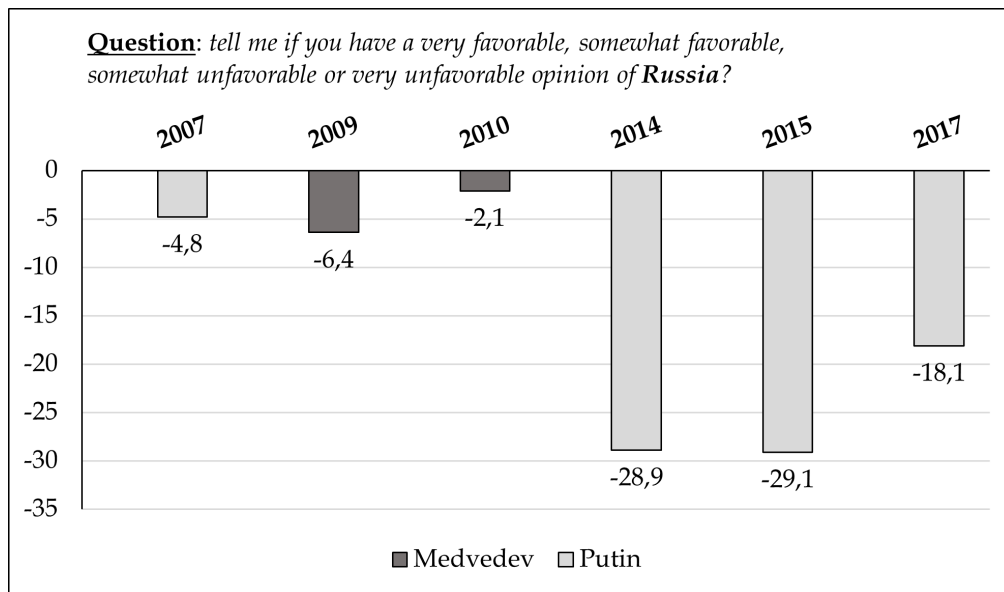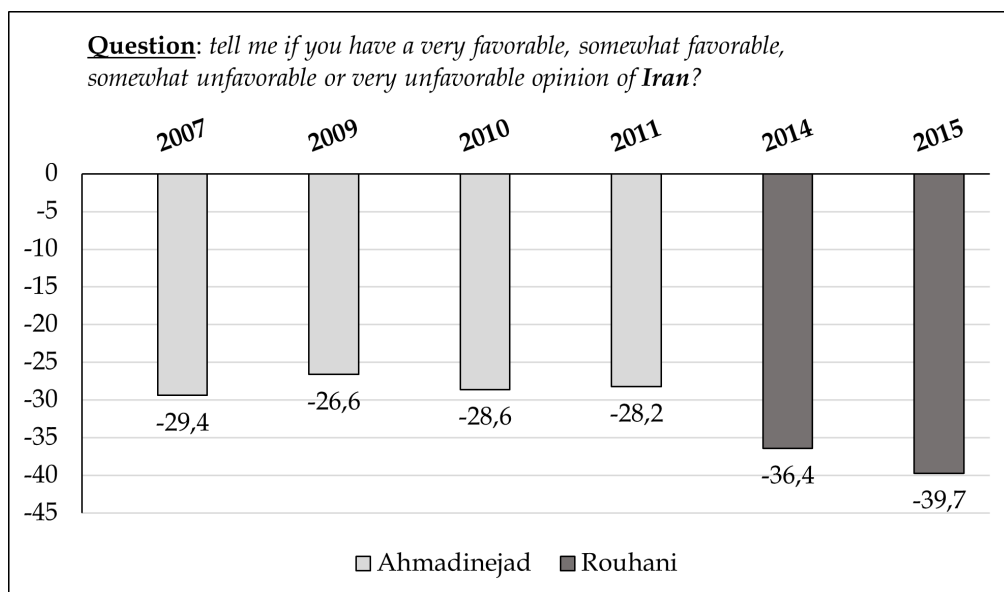
Figures 5 to 8 do not lead to any definitive conclusion, but in all four cases the international rating of the country seems to react to the change in the top leadership. The most indicative example is that of the United States, which had a very low (in fact, negative) international rating under President George W. Bush, became highly admired under the leadership of Barack Obama, and then lost all of this soft power potential as soon as Donald Trump filled the top position in the country. The authoritarian cases – China and Russia in particular – seem to follow a different pattern as changes in the top leadership position are more seldom there. Communist China, which up until recently was known for its collective leadership tradition, maintained a more or less stable

favourability rating for a decade or so despite the change of the individuals in the top positions of the Secretary General of the Communist Party and the President (in 2012 and 2013 respectively); the rating, however, droped notably after the 2018 constitutional amendments were passed removing term limits for the Presidency. It became clear that Xi Jinping was there to stay whereas the country itself was moving away from the collective leadership model towards a personal dictatorship of a strongman[36]. Similarly, the international view of Russia stayed more or less the same during Vladimir Putin's first presidency and Dmitri Medvedev's only term in office (although it must be noted that Russia reached its best score – albeit a negative one – under Medvedev). However, as soon as Putin orchestrated his own comeback to the top position in 2012 burying all hopes of democracy in Russia and proving that Medvedev was only a seat-warmer, the country's rating plummeted and has not recovered ever since. The 2014 annexation of Crimea and military incursions into Eastern Ukraine that followed Putin's return to power must have added to the deterioration of Russia's international image, but the use of force factor seems to be secondary to the decline of Russian democracy overall as Medvedev also authorized military actions against neighbouring Georgia in 2008 and did not cause a significant popularity drop for his country worldwide. Therefore, all in all, Putin and Xi are clearly unpopular authoritarian leaders that reduce their countries' ratings accordingly, but this effect became evident only after their power grab was complete.

6. SEARCHING FOR CAUSALITY: THE U.S. CASE

Even though previous sections described a strong relationship – in fact, a statistically significant correlation – between the international confidence in a leader and the view of their country, it does not prove that the leader's image determines the image of their country, not the other way around; according to the well known saying among social scientists, correlation does not mean causation. In fact, it is usually very hard to pose any causal claims based on data collected by public opinion surveys. Pew Global Attitudes surveys, however, may yet again be useful in providing a slight hint with the data collected on the U.S. case in 2005, 2009 and 2013 global waves of polling. Those were the waves that followed the U.S. presidential elections and only in those surveys the Pew questionnaire included a specific question which in a way established a causal link between the above mentioned question about the country ("do you have a very favorable, ... or very unfavorable opinion of [country name]?") and the question about the leader ("how much confidence do you have in [leader's name] to do the right thing regarding world affairs?"): "did the (re-)election of [leader's name] lead you to have a more favorable or less favorable opinion of [country name]?". As tables 1 and 9 show President George W. Bush was an internationally unpopular leader who potentially brought down the rating of his country as well (also see figure 5). One would expect that his re-election in late 2004 would have forced the majority of foreign publics to think less of the U.S. as a country immediately afterwards. By that logic, the election and re-election of President Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 respectively ought to have produced an opposite effect. The results of Spring 2005, Spring 2009 and Spring 2013 Pew Global Attitudes surveys are provided in table 10, and they are actually in line with

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[36] Nimrod Baranovitch, "A Strong Leader for A Time of Crisis: Xi Jinping's Strongman Politics as A Collective Response to Regime Weakness," *Journal of Contemporary China* Vol. 30, No. 128 (2021).

all these expectations. It may not be a definitive proof that the leader's rating affects the country's favouraility score, but it certainly points to that direction.

Table 10. Effects of a particular person taking up the Presidency of the United States on the view of the United States

Q (leader + country): did the (re-)election of President George W. Bush / Barack Obama lead you to have a more favorable or less favorable opinion of the United States?										
Country polled	Re-election of George W. Bush (2005 survey)			Election of Barack Obama (2009 survey)				Re-election of Barack Obama (2013 survey)		
	Net trust in Bush 2005	More favourable	Less favourable	Did not change	Net trust in Obama 2009	More favourable	Less favourable	did not change	More favourable	Less favourable	Did not change
Canada	-20%	20%	75%	2%	+79%	84%	6%	6%	68%	12%	14%
France	-50%	19%	74%	7%	+83%	93%	3%	4%	87%	11%	2%
Germany	-39%	14%	77%	5%	+88%	91%	1%	7%	82%	5%	11%
Greece									31%	13%	54%
Italy									67%	5%	22%
Spain	-62%	19%	60%	15%	+50%	75%	5%	16%	67%	8%	20%
UK	-22%	18%	62%	14%	+76%	77%	6%	14%	64%	10%	19%
Czechia									65%	11%	15%
Poland	+7%	21%	18%	45%	+41%	48%	11%	33%	33%	25%	33%
Russia	-29%	15%	36%	38%	-3%	40%	10%	44%	15%	12%	62%
Egypt					-5%	38%	23%	34%	19%	45%	31%
Jordan	-98%	10%	31%	54%	-27%	29%	18%	44%	24%	27%	40%
Lebanon	-53%	9%	57%	27%	-4%	34%	25%	34%	27%	32%	40%
Turkey	-75%	11%	62%	14%	-19%	38%	25%	25%	25%	27%	38%
Australia									69%	10%	16%
China					+39%	47%	10%	26%	19%	25%	33%
India					+68%	60%	21%	5%			
Indonesia	-54%	12%	52%	20%	+49%	73%	12%	8%	46%	24%	14%
Japan					+76%	77%	6%	14%	49%	16%	31%
Pakistan	-56%	10%	36%	20%	-38%	9%	23%	26%	4%	19%	20%
Philippines									77%	13%	4%
South Korea					+69%	67%	3%	24%	71%	8%	15%
Argentina					+35%	61%	5%	26%	31%	15%	41%
Brazil					+56%	77%	6%	14%	66%	15%	16%
Mexico					+22%	51%	15%	25%	39%	26%	20%
Kenya					+89%	84%	7%	8%	67%	16%	15%
Nigeria					+78%	81%	11%	5%	35%	24%	21%
South Africa									59%	17%	13%

7. ALTERNATIVE VARIABLES: NATIONAL CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

One should also entertain the idea that there is something else instead of or in addition to the change of top leadership that effects the favourability of a country among foreign publics. That "something else" could be anything and the Pew questionnaires do not cover all possible factors. However, a few annual surveys featured several questions about what could reasonably be considered "cultural attributes" of selected countries – mostly the U.S., but once also China. Those attributes are national traditions of entrepreneurship as well as music- and film-making. Since the author of the concept of soft power, Joseph S. Nye, singled out national culture and values as the original resources that generated co-optive effect between countries in international politics, it would be logical to control for their relationship with the country image. The survey questions that can potentially help to "measure" the attractiveness of a particular country's culture are the following two: "which comes closer to describing your view? – I like [particular nation's] ways of doing business, or I dislike [particular nation's] ways of doing business" and "I like [particular nation's] music, movies and television, or I dislike [particular nation's] music, movies and television". The results of Pew Global Attitudes surveys allow to control for one more variable – the nation's technological and scientific achievements – with the question "which comes closer to describing your view – I admire [country name] for its technological and scientific advances, or I do not admire [country name] for its technological and scientific advances?" As the response to all three questions is a choice between the positive and the negative, it is also possible to calculate the net attractiveness of each national attribute. Table 11 shows the statistical relationship between the net admiration for each of these national attributes and the net view of the country itself (it also includes the correlation coefficients from table 1 for comparison).

In all but two cases (both could be blamed on small N in the 2013 survey – a low number of foreign countries where the necessary questions were given to the repondents) the Pearson's Rs for country–business, country–popculture, and country–science dyads are considerably lower than the Pearson's R for the country–leader dyad. In several cases there is no statistically significant correlation between the variables in question and the country image at all. This casts serious doubts whether cultural factors are as important in generating country ratings abroad as Nye would have us believe and whether culture should be consedered soft power "resource" at all. Nye's critics, such as Niall Ferguson, were probably right in pointing out that the foreign audience may enjoy your food, films and music, but at the same time hate your country overall[37]. Pew data shows that a popular and trusted leader is likely to have a more mitigating effect than the cultural fabric alone.

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[37]   Niall Ferguson, "Think Again: Power," *Foreign Policy* No. 134 (2003): 21.

Table 11. Relationship between the attractiveness of the business model /entertainment culture / science and technology of a particular society and the view of that country overall

Q (business): which comes closer to describing your view — I like American / Chinese ways of doing business, or I dislike American / Chinese ways of doing business?						
Q (popculture): which is closer to describing your view — I like American / Chinese music, movies and television, or I dislike American / Chinese music, movies and television?						
Q (science): which comes closer to describing your view — I admire the U.S. / China for its technological and scientific advances, or I do not admire the U.S. / China for its technological and scientific advances?						
Q (country): tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of the United States / China?						

Year of survey	Aspect of the society in question	No. of countries polled	Average net attractiveness of that aspect	Average net view of the country	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Pearson's R for trust in the president
2017	music, movies & television (U.S.)	N = 37	+30.5%	+9.0%	r = 0.09 (not sign.!)	r = 0.71 (significant)
2013	ways of doing business (U.S.)	N = 13*	+34.5%	+47.4%	r = 0.93 (significant)	r = 0.75* (significant)
	music, movies & television (U.S.)	N = 13*	+30.0%	+47.4%	r = -0.31 (not sign.!)	r = 0.75* (significant)
	technology & science (U.S.)	N = 13*	+60.3%	+47.4%	r = 0.88 (significant)	r = 0.75* (significant)
2013	ways of doing business (China)	N = 13*	+17.5%	+40.6%	r = 0.80 (significant)	n/d for 2013
	music, movies & television (China)	N = 13*	-23.7%	+40.6%	r = 0.61 (significant)	n/d for 2013
	technology & science (China)	N = 13*	+53.1%	+40.6%	r = 0.78 (significant)	n/d for 2013
2012	ways of doing business (U.S.)	N = 20	-4.0%	+3.4%	r = 0.17 (not sign.!)	r = 0.81 (significant)
	music, movies & television (U.S.)	N = 20	+16.3%	+3.4%	r = 0.78 (significant)	r = 0.81 (significant)
	technology & science (U.S.)	N = 20	+41.9%	+3.4%	r = 0.38 (not sign.!)	r = 0.81 (significant)
2007	ways of doing business (U.S.)	N = 46	+3.3%	+3.8%	r = 0.65 (significant)	r = 0.88 (significant)
	music, movies & television (U.S.)	N = 46	+13.4%	+3.8%	r = 0.47 (significant)	r = 0.88 (significant)
	technology & science (U.S.)	N = 46	+49.1%	+3.8%	r = 0.59 (significant)	r = 0.88 (significant)

* only countries in Africa and Latin America.

CONCLUSIONS

In today's information age, the leading public figures in both national and international politics seem to overshadow the political collectivities they are a part of – be that a political party, a particular state bureaucracy, or the whole country. Based on survey data collected around the globe by Pew Research Center, this article (in absolute majority of cases) identified a statistically significant correlation between the international public opinion about any given national leader and their country. Causal claims about this statistical relationship are harder to establish but some modest evidence from those same surveys point to the leader being the causal factor affecting the international rating of their country, and not the other way around. Authoritarian leaders

(even leaders of democratic countries who exibit authoritarian incilnations like Donald Trump) are generally unpopular across foreign audiences, which can temporarily affect the favourability of their respective countries, but the country rating really suffers a long-term drop when the country itself starts to be perceived as inherently authoritarian. This is examplified by the repeatedly low rating of Iran, a significantly decreased rating of Russia since the early 2010s and of China since ~2018. However, based on the Pew Global Attitudes surveys, society-level factors, such as pop culture and scientific and technological achievements, seem to be poor predictors of shifts in country image around the globe. This may not totally discredit Joseph S. Nye's traditional view of what soft power is based upon, but it does suggest there may be other 'suspects' with which such power may be associated. The top politician may arguably be one of them.

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