

## **Why Do (We Think) They Hate Us: Anti-Americanism, Patriotic Messages, and Attributions of Blame**

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This study explores how news coverage about anti-American sentiment interacts with U.S. adults' sense of national identity and affects their understandings and interpretations of such negative attitudes. We build on scholarship on patriotism and social identity to conduct an experiment in which participants read one of two news stories focused on anti-American impressions. The findings suggest that news content influences both (a) how Americans interpret anti-American sentiment in general and (b) how Americans draw upon their identification with the nation in formulating attributions of blame for such sentiments and in deciding on what foreign policies to support.

*Keywords: anti-Americanism, national identity, patriotic messages, news, attributions of blame*

Americans have long been fascinated with how the rest of the world sees their country. In the eyes of many U.S. adults, America is "a land of opportunity that is the envy and aspiration of humankind" (Ivie & Giner, 2009, p. 361; Kohut & Stokes, 2006). But such a rosy view of America's image is at times ruptured by international conflicts, cultural missteps, and economic crises. In these situations, the U.S. public encounters a less positive reality—that being a global superpower can spur distrust, resentment, and, sometimes, hate (Ceaser, 2003; O'Connor, 2004). Such hostile sensibilities underlay the 1993 car bombing at the World Trade Center, the 2000 suicide bombing in Yemen on the USS *Cole*, the attacks of September 11, 2001, and worldwide protests against the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. In each of these moments, Americans encountered negative opinions from abroad about themselves as a people or the actions of their government. Partly in response, the Pew Research Center revised its Global Attitudes Project in 2001 to track international attitudes toward Americans and the United States (Kohut & Stokes, 2006), and in years since there has been a sizeable public conversation about *why* Americans might be disliked abroad and *who* merits blame for such impressions.

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Politicians, pundits, pollsters, and journalists are among the most visible in grappling with these questions. One famous instance of the types of public perspectives appeared in *Newsweek* shortly after the terrorist attacks of 2001. The news magazine's cover portrayed a young Middle Eastern boy with a toy AK-47 in hand, with the headline "Why They Hate Us" in bold black and red letters. In the article inside, *Newsweek International* editor Fareed Zakaria (2001) contended that there were several reasons: "We stand for freedom and they hate it. We are rich and they envy us. We are strong and they resent this" (p. 22). Other viewpoints on anti-American sentiment are readily found (see Chiozza, 2009; Hutcheson, Domke, Billeaudeau, & Garland, 2004; Li & Brewer, 2004). For example, in his best-selling 2010 book *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness*, Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney laid fault at the feet of President Barack Obama:

Never before in American history has its president gone before so many foreign audiences to apologize for so many American misdeeds, both real and imagined. . . . There are anti-American fires burning all across the globe; President Obama's words are like kindling to them. (Romney, 2010, p. 25)

Conflicts between the United States and countries in the Middle East and Southeast Asia ensure that the United States' image will remain controversial for some time. Unfortunately, little research has examined how news coverage of anti-Americanism may influence the ways that Americans understand themselves in relation to the rest of the world and the resulting political implications.

With this in mind, we explore the psychological dynamics among Americans when they encounter news about negative foreign opinion toward the United States and the causes for it. Specifically, we draw upon two streams of scholarship—on patriotic messages and on social identity—in conducting an experiment among general-population U.S. adults. Participants read one of two news stories discussing anti-American sentiment: one cited official sources and political opinion leaders who declared that responsibility for anti-American sentiment lay solely with foreigners, and one cited the same sources assigning responsibility to both foreigners *and* Americans for such sentiment. The experiment examined the impact of these messages on (a) attributions of responsibility for anti-American sentiment—which, in U.S. political vernacular, manifests as "blame"; (b) the cognitive link between people's identification with the United States and these blame attributions; and (c) people's support for aggressive foreign policies toward countries with anti-American sentiment. In today's global environment, such research on the ties among news content, political debate, and the psychological dynamics at work among citizens provides insight into the ways in which international impressions are fostered and transmitted widely, quickly, and often with political implications.

### **Politicians and News, Types of Patriotism, and Anti-American Sentiment**

In general, Americans rely on news coverage to learn about political and social issues (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Graber, 2001, 2004). In cases of perceived national problems or international threats, as in the case of anti-American sentiment, people are particularly dependent upon news for cues on how to interpret and understand these issues. Such a news-reliant citizenry, however, does not encounter a random set of messages; rather, news often echoes the focus and voices of political

and economic opinion leaders, including government officials (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007; Domke, 2004; Entman 2003a, 2003b). This is important because when journalists cover instances of manifest anti-American sentiment, they turn to official sources and political leaders for their interpretations. In this process, one of the key communication decisions by politicians and journalists is how to assess cause and effect for this societal concern (Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1991). Such assessments for national problems in particular often spur accusations of blame, because someone or something—rather than the nation's mythic ideals—must be at fault. Such attributions of blame, Iyengar (1991) suggests, serve as "powerful psychological cue[s]" for public opinions and attitudes, and politicians and journalists work hard and strategically to craft their words for such moments (see Domke & Coe, 2008; Manheim & Albritton, 1984; Rowling, Jones, & Sheets, 2011, Sheets, et. al., 2011). In such a context, *who* gets blamed is contested space. In this research, we are interested in whether potential differences in who is blamed for anti-American sentiment in news coverage can impact the way Americans understand and react to such expressed negative sentiment about their country.

When reporting on anti-American sentiment, journalists might choose to cite government officials and political leaders who promulgate an overtly pro-American viewpoint that reaffirms U.S. national identity (Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Hutcheson et al., 2004; Rowling, Jones, & Sheets, 2011). Such a perspective is reflective of what scholars have termed "uncritical" patriotism, which combines an unquestioning positive evaluation of the country with intolerance of national criticism (Sahar, 2008; Schatz, Staub, & Lavine, 1999). This approach is an outlook of "my country—right or wrong" (Schatz et al., 1999). In terms of attributions of blame, this perspective accepts no U.S. culpability. In the face of manifest negativity toward the United States, messages of uncritical patriotism deflect blame away from the United States and cast it outward, thereby functioning to protect the national image. All blame, therefore, is attributed to foreigners.<sup>1</sup> For example, in their analysis of *Time* and *Newsweek* in the month following September 11, 2001, Hutcheson et al. (2004) found that more than 90% of U.S. government and military sources in news coverage attributed blame solely to terrorists. Propagation of such a view encourages an overly positive and inflated national self-perception (see Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Nathanson, 1989; Schatz et al., 1999) regardless of the opinions of the rest of the world. Stated plainly, however the United States may be viewed abroad, voices of uncritical patriotism in U.S. news discourse encourage an overtly exceptionalist view of the United States and a deep, unyieldingly positive embrace of the country and its people

If journalists and pundits allow for this unquestioning pro-American discourse to flow freely and uninterrupted from political leaders through news to the public in times of heated anti-Americanism, then critical opportunities for self-reflection and potential self-correction—as Americans and as a nation—are missed. Sometimes, however, journalists may choose to cite other official voices that challenge such a one-sided perspective, thereby producing news that is more critical of, or at least reflective about, the place of the United States in the world. This second potential avenue of explanation about anti-American sentiment in news conveys the perspective of "constructive patriotism." This approach also includes a

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this article, the term *foreigner* is employed to refer to a non-American. We attach no pejorative meaning to the term, although it regularly carries such connotation in U.S. political discourse—a reality that is not unrelated to the dynamics we study in this research.

positive affinity for and attachment to the nation, but it diverges from the former approach in that it believes some criticism of the United States can be a means to improving the country and creating positive change (Sahar, 2008; Schatz et al., 1999). In this approach, blame attributions for anti-American sentiment are directed toward the United States, because such self-critiques are believed to be in the country's best interests. Such reflectivity is thought to be essential in addressing national flaws or wrongdoings that may have led to the expressed negative international sentiment. In this approach, therefore, blame for anti-American sentiment is attributed by cultural leaders to both foreigners *and* Americans. A constructively patriotic perspective has significant potential positive implications: such news coverage may enable political leaders and citizens to engage in an open, perhaps even robust, assessment of the United States while still embracing the fundamental tenets of the nation.

### **National Identification, Attributions of Blame, and Foreign Policy Preferences**

With this in mind, we now focus on the connections between public opinion and the discourses of uncritical or constructive patriotism in U.S. politics and news coverage. To begin, we assert that in moments when anti-Americanism is manifest, news decisions regarding whether to echo the commonly uncritical interpretations of official sources or to openly consider any potential U.S. responsibility impact how citizens form opinions about their nation and the world's perceptions of it. A substantial body of scholarship shows that news framings can shape political opinions (cf. Bryant & Oliver, 2009). In this case, we suggest that emphasis in news coverage on uncritically patriotic lines of reasoning about anti-Americanism—that is, attributing blame solely to foreigners—is much more likely to spur ethnocentric, pro-American responses about who is responsible for anti-American sentiment than constructively patriotic explanations. In other words, when exposed to uncritically patriotic news content that attributes blame only to foreigners, people should have a stronger tendency to push blame in that geopolitical direction and away from Americans. In contrast, a constructively patriotic line of reasoning that openly contemplates potential U.S. contributions to anti-American sentiments should spur less of an ethnocentric bias when people make attributions of blame. That is, such news coverage should be more likely to encourage citizens to adopt a more balanced approach to assigning responsibility for anti-American sentiment, attributing blame more equally to both foreigners and Americans. With this in mind, we offer our first hypothesis:

*H1: U.S. adults exposed to a news account with an uncritically patriotic line of reasoning about anti-Americanism will exhibit greater ethnocentric bias about the causes for such sentiments than those exposed to a constructively patriotic line of reasoning.*

At the same time, it may be that the impact of news coverage on people's attributions of blame for anti-Americanism is mediated by one's disposition toward the United States. The concept of social and national identification has a long history in social psychology (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987; Turner, 1982) and in recent years has gained a foothold in communication studies (Hutcheson et al., 2004; Jones & Sheets, 2009; Rivenburgh, 1997, 2000; Rowling, Jones, & Sheets, 2011). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that, in making sense of one's place in the world, people both identify as being members of certain social groups and derive self-value from such membership. In turn, because individual identity is tied to one's social groups, people seek to evaluate

"in-groups" more positively than "out-groups" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1982). Such social identification, Tajfel (1981) contends, leads people to make "constant causal attributions about the processes responsible" (p. 137) for the attitudes and actions of members of out-groups *and* in-groups. In such instances, the more people identify with in-groups, the more they tend to form positive impressions of their own groups and negative views of out-groups. This seems particularly likely for national identifications, which have been shown to be among the strongest forms of group identity (Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Li & Brewer, 2004; Schatz et al., 1999; Sidanius, Feshbach, Levin, & Pratto, 1997). As a result, national identification has the potential to be a superordinate sensibility that supersedes other identities and can amplify feelings of in-group bias.

We are interested, therefore, in whether uncritical or constructive patriotic lines of reasoning about anti-American sentiment in news impact how people's national identification is cognitively connected to their attributions of blame. On the one hand, news coverage of anti-American sentiment that is uncritical of the national group and places blame on foreigners should tend to resonate seamlessly with both people's sense of national identification and the accompanying in-group bias. In other words, because uncritically patriotic news content reinforces an already cognitively ingrained in-group bias, people's sense of national identification should have few cognitive obstructions in moving to "logical" assignments of blame on others. We would expect, then, that when exposed to such news, people's national identification should be directly linked to both an embrace of foreigner blame and a rejection of U.S. blame. We expect this because when U.S. adults encounter news that bolsters their sense of national pride, it seems that the more they identify with other Americans, the more likely they would be to seek ways to evaluate that national group in a more positive light than those expressing the negative sentiments about them.

On the other hand, news coverage that is constructively patriotic does not facilitate an unimpeded cognitive tie between national identity and blame for anti-American sentiment. Specifically, scholarship (Bandura, 1990; Rothgerber, 1997) suggests that when individuals are encouraged to negatively evaluate their social or national groups, they commonly become defensive and engage in various cognitive strategies to protect their in-group and their connection with it. In this case, we expect constructively patriotic news that considers potential U.S. contributions to anti-Americanism to provoke two specific types of group protective strategies: one when assessing U.S. blame and another when considering foreigner blame. In such news discourse, Americans are not granted *unchallenged* positive status, which contradicts the belief many Americans hold about the "exceptional" condition of their country (Ivie & Giner, 2009; Lipset, 1996). Americans encountering such news messages may therefore seek to protect their own national group by disassociating their senses of (a) national criticism and (b) national identification. We expect constructively patriotic messages to spur people to separate—that is, to *distance*—their sense of connection with the nation from their criticisms of it. This cognitive approach allows people to compartmentalize and be both critical of the national group and proud of it at the same time. In contrast, among people encountering *uncritical* news content, in which the United States is protected and blame for anti-Americanism is directed exclusively toward foreigners, national identification and blame of Americans are more likely to be linked—and almost certainly in an inverse manner. We expect this, because when Americans encounter news that bolsters their sense of U.S. pride, it seems

reasonable that, as their national identification rises, their willingness to accept U.S. blame will most likely decrease. In light of these perspectives, we offer the following hypothesis:

*H2: U.S. adults exposed to a news account emphasizing a constructively patriotic line of reasoning about anti-Americanism will exhibit a weaker relationship between national identification and blame of Americans than those exposed to an uncritically patriotic line of reasoning.*

If constructively patriotic messages do indeed prompt U.S. adults to protect their sense of national identification by disassociating it from their own criticism of the national group, then we might also expect such messages to provoke another defense mechanism. Research on social identity (Dietz-Uhler, 1999; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Rothgerber, 1997) has shown that people react to negative information about their social group by evaluating other groups—specifically those involved in the related social conflict—in disproportionately negative ways. In other words, when people are encouraged to accept negative in-group characterizations, it is cognitively useful to magnify negative evaluations of other groups—so that others appear worse by comparison. If this is so, we should expect that people exposed to constructively patriotic news will seek ways to defend their national group by linking their sense of pride in the country directly and positively with a harsh criticism, or blame, of foreigners. In contrast, uncritically patriotic news messages are less likely to encourage such an intense coupling of U.S. identification with blaming of foreigners for two reasons. First, an uncritical message itself goes some distance in relieving any sense of national challenge by affirming the United States and attributing blame for anti-Americanism exclusively to foreigners. Second, because the uncritically patriotic account does not suggest dual blame, the likelihood of an explicit comparison is diminished; as a result, one's thoughts about the United States and foreigners are not as likely to be interwoven. The irony, then, may be that, even though constructively patriotic discussions ponder U.S. failings, news coverage emphasizing such a view may spur people to employ their national attachment as *even more* of a defense mechanism. These expectations lead to the following hypothesis:

*H3: U.S. adults exposed to a news account with a constructively patriotic line of reasoning about anti-Americanism will exhibit a stronger relationship between national identification and blame of foreigners than those exposed to an uncritically patriotic line of reasoning.*

Finally, we are interested in whether news emphases on uncritically patriotic or constructively patriotic lines of reasoning can facilitate cognitive processes that produce distinct policy preferences. It seems reasonable to expect that the linkages among news, political discourse, and national identification come together in meaningful ways when people evaluate the types of foreign policies that the United States should adopt when dealing with countries with high levels of anti-American sentiment. If group defense mechanisms are as deeply entrenched as scholarship suggests (cf. Hogg & Abrams, 1988), then we might expect constructively patriotic news messages to encourage U.S. adults to cognitively couple U.S. identification with not only blame of foreigners but a willingness to *punish* such foreign out-groups. That is, U.S. adults exposed to constructively patriotic news messages may manifest stronger ties between their identification with the in-group nation and their support for harsh policies toward foreign out-groups—such as imposing sanctions on, or completely severing relations with, countries that have expressed contempt for Americans or the United States. In contrast, such relationships are less likely to

be found among those encountering uncritically patriotic news accounts, which have gone some distance to *rhetorically accomplishing* these outcomes through the outward-focused, one-sided blaming of others. We offer, then, our final hypothesis:

*H4: U.S. adults exposed to a news account with a constructively patriotic line of reasoning about anti-Americanism will exhibit a stronger relationship between national identification and support for harsh foreign policies than those exposed to an uncritically patriotic line of reasoning.*

### Method

To examine these relationships, we conducted an experiment among adults in a large Northwestern state in early 2010. Participants were passengers on public, state-operated ferries serving a metropolitan area. People participated in the research while sitting in common areas during the passage of ferries from one location to another. A total of 142 adults completed the full study and were included in analysis. Non-U.S. citizens and individuals who were younger than 18 were excluded from the study. The study population was slightly more male (57%) and consisted predominantly of White respondents (82.6%), followed by Asian Americans (2.9%), African Americans (2.2%), Native Americans (2.2%), Latinos or Hispanics (0.7%), and unidentified ethnic groups (9.4%). Education was measured on a 6-point scale (median and mode = 4, completed college degree). Finally, political ideology was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from *extremely liberal* to *extremely conservative* ( $M = 3.4$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ). These demographics aligned with regional patterns.

Study participants were presented with hard copies of one of two fictional news stories discussing anti-American sentiment in the world and an accompanying questionnaire. The news stories were crafted to emulate news articles from the Associated Press and included fictitious information from a Pew Global Attitudes Project survey and quotes from a retired military general. News by the Associated Press circulates widely throughout the U.S. news ecology, and it is not associated with a distinctly liberal or conservative perspective. As a result, it is the kind of content that U.S. adults who attend to any news outlets are likely to encounter in some fashion, irrespective of the self-selecting media biases that are common among citizens in the 21st century (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Stroud, 2008).

Half of the participants were randomly assigned an article that presented Pew survey data documenting anti-American sentiment in several nations and then offered an explanatory narrative placing blame for these views solely on foreigners. This news story, therefore, offered an uncritically patriotic line of reasoning for the anti-American perspective. The other participants were randomly assigned a similar article that contained the same Pew survey data, but offered an explanatory narrative that placed some blame on foreigners while also stating that Americans shoulder some responsibility for being disliked abroad. This news story, then, offered a constructively patriotic line of reasoning for the anti-American perspective.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. Part one focused on levels of national identification, and part two examined impressions of the reasons—who should be blamed, in the political vernacular—for foreigners' negative attitudes toward the United States and Americans. A third part measured support for

specific policies by the United States when dealing with countries that exhibit high levels of anti-American sentiment, and a final component captured demographic and orientational information. Participants were asked to indicate their levels of agreement with the statements in the first three sections on a 1 to 5 scale in which 1 meant they disagreed strongly and 5 meant they agreed strongly. In a final step, all composite variables were converted into standardized scores. See the Appendix for the complete questionnaire.

To measure national identification, we began with three items from a scale of national attachment created by Huddy and Khatib (2007): "The term *American* describes me well" ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ), "I feel close to other Americans" ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), and "Being an American isn't an important part of who I am" ( $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ). We created two additional measures of national identification: "I feel personally criticized when I hear people from other countries criticizing Americans" ( $M = 2.8$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ) and "If I were to travel abroad, it would be important to me to tell people that I am proud to be an American" ( $M = 2.9$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ). A composite variable of national identification was created from these five measures ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

Next, we examined participants' impressions of why people in other countries have negative attitudes toward Americans. These items directly captured attributions of blame. We provided measures tapping two types of reasons: one emphasizing the responsibility of Americans and one emphasizing the responsibility of foreigners. Each category of reasoning contained six items. For these two categories, respondents were provided the following prompt:

Although we recognize that there are people around the world who admire Americans, the following questions ask about those who do not. Generally speaking, to what extent do you think the following reasons cause certain people in other countries to dislike Americans?

They were then directed to choose from among several options. For blame of Americans, examples of questionnaire items were: "Americans are seen as not being considerate of the needs of other countries" ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ) and "Americans are seen as arrogant about their way of life" ( $M = 4.1$ ,  $SD = .89$ ). The second category included items that placed blame on foreigners. Examples included: "They have always been jealous of the opportunities that Americans have" ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) and "They are just close-minded about the American way of life" ( $M = 2.7$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ). Two composite variables were constructed from each of the types of attributions: American blame ( $\alpha = .72$ ) and foreign blame ( $\alpha = .77$ ).

Policy preferences were tapped by three statements about potential U.S. treatment of countries exhibiting a high level of anti-American sentiment. These statements assessed support for policies traditionally conceived as examples of "hard power" (Nye, 2002). Examples included: "The United States should impose tough sanctions to deal with countries that are anti-American" ( $M = 2.43$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ), and "The United States should suspend *all* relations with any anti-American country" ( $M = 1.75$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ). These items were combined into a composite variable of harsh policy preferences ( $\alpha = .75$ ).



## Results

### ***Hypothesis 1***

Hypothesis 1 focused on an expectation of difference between experimental conditions—that U.S. adults who read the news article with an uncritically patriotic explanation for anti-Americanism would exhibit greater ethnocentric bias about the causes for such sentiments than U.S. adults who read the news account emphasizing constructive patriotism. In essence, we expected there to be less of a tendency toward an ethnocentric bias for people encountering news that suggests both foreigners *and* Americans bore responsibility for anti-American attitudes. To examine this difference, we first subtracted the “blame of America” index from the “blame of foreigners” index to create a dependent variable of ethnocentric bias. We then ran an independent sample *t* test between the experimental conditions.

Results provided support for Hypothesis 1. Participants who read the news account emphasizing constructive patriotism exhibited much less of a propensity toward ethnocentric bias ( $M = -0.12$ ) than participants who read the news account emphasizing uncritical patriotism ( $M = 0.16$ ), with  $t(129) = 1.55$ ,  $p = .06$ . Two points are noteworthy. First, participants in both experimental conditions tended to hold a fairly balanced view of who is to blame for anti-American sentiment. This outcome may have been due to the liberal-leaning nature of the sample population (42% identified as leaning liberal and another 32% identified as being moderate/middle of the road). Second, when this analysis was conducted separately for the subcomponents of the ethnocentric bias, results were not significant; such a statistical finding occurred only when blame attributions for both Americans and foreigners were included. In sum, then, U.S. adults who read the uncritically patriotic news account were significantly more likely to gravitate toward an ethnocentric bias than were U.S. adults who read the news account emphasizing constructive patriotism.

### ***Hypotheses 2 and 3***

Hypothesis 2 was tested within experimental conditions examining the correlation between respondents’ national identification and blame of *Americans* for anti-Americanism. We hypothesized that respondents exposed to a constructively patriotic news account would seek to protect their sense of national identification by disassociating it from their own critique of Americans, leading to a weaker relationship between levels of national identification and amount of blame of Americans than among respondents exposed to an uncritically patriotic news account. To test this hypothesis, separate correlations were run for participants in each of the news environments between people’s identification with the nation and the extent of blame placed on Americans.

Hypothesis 2 was supported. Among participants who read the news article with a constructively patriotic explanation for anti-Americanism, there was a negligible inverse relationship between national identification and blame of Americans ( $r = -.08$ , *n.s.*), whereas among participants who read the news account emphasizing uncritical patriotism, there was a statistically significant and inverse correlation between the two ( $r = -.38$ ,  $p < .01$ ). A Fisher *r*-to-*z* transformation showed the correlations to be significantly different from one another ( $z = 1.82$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These results indicate that, for participants in

both conditions, an embrace of the national group was accompanied by a growing rejection of U.S. blame for anti-Americanism—a not overly surprising finding. This pattern of results, however, was significantly weaker among participants in the constructively patriotic news environment, suggesting that national identification and national blame were less cognitively entangled in these individuals' information processing.

Hypothesis 3 examined the correlation between participants' national identification and blame of *foreigners* for anti-American sentiment. We expected U.S. adults encountering a news account emphasizing a constructively patriotic line of reasoning about anti-Americanism would exhibit a stronger relationship between national identification and blame of foreigners than U.S. adults encountering a news account containing an uncritically patriotic line of reasoning about anti-Americanism. To test this hypothesis, separate correlations were run for participants in each of the news environments between people's identification with the nation and the extent of blame placed on foreigners.

Hypothesis 3 was supported. Among participants who read the news article emphasizing a constructively patriotic explanation for anti-Americanism, there was a strong correlation between national identification and blame of foreigners ( $r = .67, p < .01$ ), whereas among participants who read the news article emphasizing an uncritically patriotic explanation for anti-Americanism, the correlation between the two was present but less robust ( $r = .28, p < .05$ ). A Fisher  $r$ -to- $z$  transformation showed the correlations to be significantly different from one another ( $z = 2.92, p < .05$ ). For participants in both conditions, therefore, an embrace of the national group was accompanied by a growing blame of foreigners for anti-Americanism, but this pattern was much stronger among participants in the constructively patriotic news environment, suggesting that national identification and national blame were significantly more entangled in these individuals' information processing. It is plausible that such a cognitive intertwining was all the more necessary because, as we saw in Hypothesis 2, among these individuals there was a severing of the connection between national identification and a rejection of U.S. blame. That news coverage contributed to these dynamics seems to be the case.

Additionally, we conducted regression analyses within each experimental condition to further examine the distinct impacts of the news messages in the relationship between national identification and attributions of blame while taking into account other potential predictive factors. Sequential linear regressions were run in each experimental condition with *American blame* and *foreigner blame* as the dependent variables and with participants' race, gender, political ideology, and level of education in the first set of independent variables and national identification in the second set (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Sequential Regression Analysis Predicting Attributions of Blame for Foreigners and Americans by Experimental Condition.**

	Type of News Message			
	Uncritical Patriotism		Constructive Patriotism	
	Blame of Americans	Blame of foreigners	Blame of Americans	Blame of foreigners
Race	-.06	-.05	.12	-.01
Education level	.22	-.13	.26*	.02
Gender	-.01	-.13	.37**	.08
Political ideology	-.12	.36**	-.15	.19
National identification	-.36**	.19	-.05	.56***
Adjusted $R^2$	.16	.18	.13	.40
Change in adjusted $R^2$ accounted for by national identification	.11	.00	.02	.22
$F$ for change in adjusted $R^2$	8.02**	.14	2.15	23.24***

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 1 displays several interesting findings. First, in the uncritically patriotic news condition, national identification was the only significant predictor for blame of Americans. Other potential influences such as political ideology or level of education were not significant in the shadow of the more immediately important national identification, which alone accounted for 11% of variance in blame of Americans when brought into the equation. Second, national identification was not found to be a significant predictor for blame of foreigners; the standardized beta (.19) does indicate a positive relationship between national identification and blame of foreigners, but the strength of this variable's influence paled in comparison to that of political ideology ( $\beta$  of .36), which showed that self-identified conservatives were more likely than liberals to blame foreigners for anti-Americanism. These findings suggest that, because the national group was not directly challenged by the news message, national identity was more tied to rejecting blame away from the national group than to directing blame toward foreigners.

Alternatively, in the constructive patriotism news condition, we see further evidence for both of our hypothesized in-group defense mechanisms. First, national identification played no role in predicting blame of Americans, suggesting that people presented with a balance of praise and critique of the nation in the news disassociated their national identity from their evaluations of Americans; instead of this potential relationship, education and gender became more centrally tied to blame being placed on Americans for anti-American sentiment, with women and those who are highly educated more likely to blame Americans. Second, among these participants, national identification played a significant and singular role in predicting blame of foreigners, with a standardized beta (.56) nearly three times larger than any other predictor in the equation. Of specific note in this news condition is that national identification alone accounted for 22% of variance in blame of foreigners, illustrating its central role. These results suggest, as hypothesized, that a news story raising critical questions about the national in-

group turned respondents' national attachment into a sort of defense mechanism that became a defining factor in how they assigned blame to foreigners. These findings, then, reveal the central role of national identification in people's minds when they encounter news coverage about the nation's standing in the world.

#### **Hypothesis 4**

Finally, Hypothesis 4 examined whether news messages can impact the centrality of national identification in people's evaluations of foreign policies—specifically, how to deal with countries exhibiting explicit anti-American sentiment. We hypothesized that national identification would be a stronger predictor of support for harsh foreign policies among U.S. adults encountering a news account emphasizing a constructively patriotic line of reasoning about anti-Americanism than among those encountering a news account emphasizing an uncritically patriotic line of reasoning about anti-Americanism. To test this prediction, we conducted a sequential linear regression across experimental conditions with *hard-power foreign policy preferences* as the dependent variable. Independent variables were entered sequentially in the following order: race, gender, and level of education in the first set; political ideology, national identification, ethnocentric bias, and news milieu in the second set; and two items in the third that accounted for interactions between (a) news version and national identification and (b) news version and political ideology (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Sequential Regression Analysis Predicting Support of Hard-Power Policies Across Experimental Conditions.**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Gender	-.08	-.01	-.04
Education level	-.02	.05	.00
Race	.07	.10	.14
Political ideology		.12	.11
National identification		.06	.12
Ethnocentric bias		.38**	.33**
News version		.13	.20
News version $\times$ national identification			.67*
News version $\times$ political ideology			-.79***
Adjusted $R^2$	.00	.18	.26
Change in adjusted $R^2$		.18	.08
$F$ for change in adjusted $R^2$		7.61***	6.77**

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

There are several findings of note in Table 2. First and foremost, we found significant interaction effects for (a) type of news message and national identification ( $\beta = .67$ ) and (b) type of news message and political ideology ( $\beta = -.79$ ) in predicting support among participants for hard-power foreign policies. For the former, national identification was found to be a significantly stronger predictor of support of harsh foreign policies for the participants who read constructively patriotic news. This finding suggests that a news account contemplating some U.S. culpability for anti-Americanism triggered an in-group defense mechanism similar to that found in the process of blame attribution. In this case, people's national identification became closely entangled with their support for harsher foreign policies to deal with "anti-American" countries, with the two constructs increasing in tandem. The latter interaction indicates that political ideology was particularly important in people's assessments about hard-power foreign policies for the participants who read uncritically patriotic news. This finding suggests that this news account did not directly threaten people's sense of national identification, thereby prompting participants in this condition to draw upon political ideology, with conservatives more than liberals, as central in deciding support for harsh foreign policy preferences. Second, the only other significant influence on assessments of hard-power foreign policies toward anti-American nations was people's levels of ethnocentric bias, suggesting that regardless of levels of national identification, political orientation, or the kinds of patriotic arguments in news to which they were exposed, people who disproportionately blamed foreigners over Americans tended to support harsher foreign policies. Finally, the predictor variables explained 26% of variance, suggesting that the collection of variables exerted meaningful predictive power for participants' foreign policy preferences.

### Discussion

This research examines how adult Americans process news content about the nation's standing on the global stage and who, ultimately, is responsible for that position. Throughout the nation's history, Americans have had to come to terms with the reality of anti-American sentiment in the world, particularly in recent decades, and it is often news coverage that highlights and attempts to interpret this sentiment for U.S. citizens (see Gamson et al., 1992; Graber, 2001, 2004). Research on the nature and effects of news discourse in these contexts, however, is largely absent. With this in mind, this study examines the ways in which people process news messages that offer distinctive explanations for negative attitudes toward the United States. The findings suggest that differing types of news accounts, constructively patriotic and uncritically patriotic perspectives, can significantly impact the way U.S. adults—or at least some of them—attribute blame for anti-American sentiment. This research has several implications for understanding relations among patriotism, news coverage, and international perceptions.

First, our findings suggest that constructively patriotic lines of reasoning, when applied to anti-American sentiment, encourage individuals to protect their own identification with the national group by psychologically disentangling that sense of national pride from their willingness to blame Americans. An outlook of "constructive patriotism" (Sahar, 2008; Schatz et al., 1999) has been labeled such because it pairs national affirmation with consideration of national flaws, motivated by a desire to improve the nation. Our evidence indicates that such a perspective may enable U.S. adults to assign blame to Americans while *simultaneously* being proud of their national group. This both/and national reflectivity would seem to be a valuable posture in public discourse. At the same time, however, our findings suggest

that a constructive patriotism news account triggered a second defense mechanism in which one's identification with the nation became strongly tied to both blame of foreigners and a propensity toward punishment via harsh foreign policies. It may be, then, that constructive patriotism news did prompt a more reflective or introspective stance among U.S. respondents about the United States, but at the cost of their conception and treatment of their international counterparts. It is important for future research to delve into whether constructive patriotism outlooks may reflect isolationism over internationalism and, therefore, impact Americans' general understanding of themselves and others in the world.

Second, this study provides insight into how news messages contribute to a commonplace attempt by Americans to construct or maintain an exceptional image of the nation. Uncritical patriotism accounts, which research suggests are functionally blindly patriotic with an unquestioning approval of the nation and placement of responsibility elsewhere (Sahar, 2008; Schatz et al., 1999), seem to offer a *vicarious* blame-the-other framework that relieves citizens from interweaving their embrace of the nation with a harsh displacement of blame onto others. Such a process may go too far, however. Specifically, if displacing blame onto foreigners has become such an entrenched practice regardless of people's levels of national identification, then uncritical messages may work to perpetuate a closed-off outlook throughout the population. Such messages, as a result, might facilitate an isolationist or exceptionalist approach across the board toward assessing the wide range of important issues that involve the United States and other countries. Further research, therefore, might examine how uncritically patriotic-oriented news impacts a wider array of foreign policy preferences of U.S. adults, including tendencies toward military engagement or diplomacy.

Third, because the participants in our experiment are more diverse in age, education, and income than a typical undergraduate sample, we were able to gain greater insight into how a range of phenomena interact among adults encountering these types of news coverage. At the same time, our sample was comprised of a predominantly White population that leaned liberal in political ideology. These empirical realities limit our findings to some degree, but it is important to note that the issue of patriotism—or strong affinity for country, as it is often conceived in U.S. politics—is an outlook that political conservatives claim to be one of their fortes (Andrews, 1997). Our findings with a significantly liberal population suggest a strong interaction of patriotic messaging with national identification regardless of political leaning and therefore lend credence to the applicability of social identity theory across political ideologies. This dynamic merits additional research in a globalizing world.

Finally, in the often-tense post-September 11 international environment, it is important to understand the potential influences of these and other types of patriotic explanations on the policies that Americans pursue or support, particularly in regard to nations that are either genuinely anti-American or are framed that way by U.S. politicians or by U.S. news coverage. The image of the United States is better than it was in the immediate aftermath of the launching of the Iraq War (Kohut, Wike, Carriere-Kretschmer, Holzward, & Poushter, 2009; Kull, Ramsay, & Lewis, 2009), but an end to anti-American sentiment is not likely in the near future. If history has taught anything about the position of global superpowers, it is that there is a fine line between admiration and envy, support and disfavor, fondness and antipathy in the interplay of people and countries. Furthermore, even favorable conditions can change with single events. It is therefore essential for scholars, journalists, educators, and politicians to

understand how Americans may strike a more thoughtful balance between a sense of exceptionalism, so embedded in the nation's psyche, and their understanding of their role on the international stage. At a minimum, this research suggests that messages about the United States' image in the world—communicated by leaders and promulgated widely through news coverage—can exert significant influence on how U.S. citizens evaluate themselves, their country, and others around the globe.

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### Appendix: Respondent Questionnaire

**PART 1:** Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 means you disagree strongly, 3 means you're neutral, and 5 means you agree strongly. PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER.

EXAMPLE: Strongly disagree    1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5    Strongly agree

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

1. If I were to travel abroad, it would be important to me to tell people that I am proud to be an American.
2. The term *American* describes me well.
3. I do *not* consider myself to be a typical American.
4. I feel close to other Americans.
5. Being an American is an important part of who I am.
6. I feel personally criticized when I hear people from other countries criticizing Americans.
7. I feel ashamed or embarrassed when America looks bad internationally.

**PART 2:** The following questions ask you to evaluate a variety of potential reasons for why some people in other countries may not like Americans. As before, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 means you disagree strongly, 3 means you're neutral, and 5 means you agree strongly. PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER.

Although we recognize that there are people around the world who admire Americans, the following questions ask about those who do not. Generally speaking, to what extent do you think the following reasons cause certain people in other countries to dislike Americans?

1. They dislike Americans because they are just fundamentally different from us.
2. They have always been jealous of the opportunities that Americans have.
3. Americans are seen as not being considerate of the needs of other countries.
4. Americans are seen as arrogant about their way of life.
5. They will just never understand Americans.
6. Americans are seen as not caring enough about the problems that other countries face.
7. Americans are seen as acting superior about their power and wealth.
8. They are simply ignorant about Americans.
9. Americans are seen as wasteful and disrespectful of the world's resources.
10. They are just close-minded about the American way of life.
11. They are envious of American wealth.
12. Americans are seen as being closed off to the rest of the world.

**PART 3:** As before, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 means you disagree strongly, 3 means you're neutral or don't know, and 5 means you agree strongly. PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

1. The best way to deal with anti-American countries is through aggressive foreign policies.
2. The United States should impose tough sanctions to deal with countries that are anti-American.
3. The United States should suspend *all* relations with any anti-American country.

**PART 4:** The following questions are general demographic questions about you. As before, PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER.

1. Generally speaking, which of the following do you consider yourself?
 

1 = Strong Republican	4 = Lean Democrat
2 = Lean Republican	5 = Strong Democrat
3 = Independent	
  
2. We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?
 

1 = Extremely liberal	5 = Slightly conservative
2 = Liberal	6 = Conservative
3 = Slightly liberal	7 = Extremely conservative
4 = Moderate; middle of the road	
  
3. What is your gender?
 

1 = Male	
2 = Female	
  
4. What racial or ethnic group best describes you?
 

1 = Black	5 = Asian
2 = Hispanic	6 = Native American
3 = Latino/a	7 = Other _____
4 = White	
  
5. What was the last grade or class that you completed in school?
 

1 = Did not complete high school	4 = Completed college degree
2 = Completed high school or equivalent	5 = Some graduate school
3 = Some college	6 = Completed graduate degree
  
6. In what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Are you a U.S. citizen by birth or by naturalization?
 

1 = U.S. citizen by birth	
2 = Naturalized citizen	