

# NEWS FROM AFAR: FOREIGN MEDIA AND U.S. PUBLIC OPINION

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**ABSTRACT:** Concerns over foreign influence in American politics through state-owned news media like RT, Sputnik, and Al Jazeera have made headlines in recent years, at the same time as IR scholars have become increasingly interested in the effects of foreign voices on public opinion, as well as in testing the effects of public diplomacy efforts more generally. Worries over the potentially pernicious transnational effects of foreign media rest on at least two assumptions: that these foreign news sources successfully reach significant audiences in other countries, and that individuals who consume foreign news espouse systematically different views. We seek to test both of these assumptions empirically, integrating a nationally representative panel survey of Americans with behavioral individual-level measures of media consumption to paint a clearer picture of foreign news media consumption in the United States. The results have important implications for studies of public opinion about foreign policy, public diplomacy, and the fields of media and political communication more generally, and offer a new behavioral method for the study of public diplomacy.

A first draft, for presentation at Virtual ISA 2020. Thanks for reading!

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## Introduction

Concerns over foreign influence in American politics through foreign news outlets like RT, Sputnik, and Al Jazeera have made headlines in recent years. While Western countries have long used state broadcasting to attempt to affect political dynamics in non-democratic countries (e.g. Cull 2008, Kern and Hainmueller 2009), there are now renewed concerns about non-democratic countries using similar tools against democratic regimes.

These developments are of clear substantive importance for politicians, but they are also of clear theoretical importance for political scientists, for at least three reasons. First, they tie into broader debates about the efficacy of public diplomacy (Goldsmith and Horiuchi 2009, Atkinson 2010, Schatz and Levine 2010, Matush 2018). Outward-aimed media agencies are one way in which foreign governments can take their messages to foreign audiences. Yet as is the case with other forms of public diplomacy, it is unclear whether these platforms work to the degree that their proponents claim and critics allege. Outlets like RT, like media outlets in general, have incentives to exaggerate the size of their audience, while critics have similar incentives to overstate these outlets' influence.

Second, they raise questions about how the rise of the internet and new media has transformed the ways that citizens receive political information (Fung, Russon Gilman and Shkabatur 2013). Traditional models of media in American politics were often based on a national media landscape with relatively few players (e.g. Robinson 2001), rather than a fragmented landscape with a plurality of voices. “Indexing” or “manufacturing consent” models of the media, for example, envisioned the media as passively transmitting the wishes of domestic political elites (Herman and Chomsky 2010), which requires both a relatively small number of relevant media actors (to facilitate coordination) and a high degree of cohesiveness between them. Yet if the average American household in the 1970s had access to only six television channels, the contemporary media landscape features a dizzying array of outlets for Americans to choose from (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013). And while the rise of the internet has accelerated the decline of local print media (Hayes and Lawless 2018), it has also increased the availability of media sources abroad.

Third, they have implications for debates about the effects of foreign voices on domestic opinion. Whereas political scientists have traditionally been focused on the effects of cues from domestic political elites (Zaller 1992, Berinsky 2009), a more recent literature has turned to the effects of foreign cuegivers, whether individuals (Hayes and Guardino 2011, Dragojlovic 2015), or institutions (Thompson 2009, Chapman 2011, Grieco et al. 2011, Busby et al. 2019). Broadening our understanding of the contemporary media environment to include foreign media outlets adds an additional set of actors in the mix.

Altogether, these debates about the effects of foreign media on American public opinion rest on two assumptions. The first is that foreign news sources successfully reach significant audiences in the United States. The second is that individuals who consume foreign news espouse systematically different views as a result. Recent work has sought to test this second assumption empirically, using survey experiments to test whether respondents randomly assigned to receive a news story from a particular foreign news source express significantly different policy preferences than individuals in a control condition ([Carter and Carter 2019](#), [Fisher 2020](#)). Yet since treatments cannot have an effect if no one receives them, these findings also hinge upon the first assumption, which has yet to be tested. These studies also deliberately seek to study a single foreign media outlet in isolation, rather than examine the foreign media ecosystem as a whole.

In this paper, we provide what we believe to be the first systematic investigation of foreign news in American public opinion. Our interest is threefold. First, at a basic descriptive level, to what extent do Americans consume foreign news, and what kind of foreign news do they consume? Second, and perhaps more theoretically interesting, who consumes foreign news? Are they cosmopolitans seeking to add a global perspective to their news diet? Or, are they cynics who are turning to news from abroad because of their distrust in the domestic media institutions at home? Third, and relatedly, how do the political attitudes of individuals consuming foreign news differ from those consuming domestic news sources?

The discussion below has three parts. We begin by offering a theory of foreign news consumption, focusing on both the supply side (why do different types of news outlets seek foreign audiences, and how are they able to do so?) and the demand side (why do Americans seek foreign news?) We then discuss the methodology of our study, fielding a panel survey on a nationally representative sample of American adults through YouGov, and pairing it with individual-level behavioral measures of respondents' online media consumption obtained at the URL-level in real-time over an eight-month period. This mix of attitudinal and behavioral data enable us to paint an unusually variegated picture of what Americans' media consumption patterns look like in the twenty-first century, and better understand how foreign news sources fit in. We then present our findings, showing that foreign news consumption is relatively low, but still substantively significant, with as many Americans accessing some of the more popular foreign news sites as they do some popular domestic news sites, and roughly 3 in 5 Americans in our sample accessed foreign news online at least once during this period. We also find that some countries, like Russia and Qatar, punch above their weight in terms of the audience their news sites draw in the United States, while others, like China, underperform. Furthermore, we show that although cosmopolitans are more likely to access foreign news, and nationalists and isolationists less likely, there is also a group of Americans who turn to foreign news because of their distrust in domestic

media.

## The Rise of Foreign News

There is a large literature emphasizing the important role of the media in foreign policy (e.g. [Brody 1991](#), [Robinson 2001](#), [Baum 2002](#), [Berinsky and Kinder 2006](#), [Slantchev 2006](#), [Baum and Groeling 2009](#)). Whether in discussions of negative media coverage during the War in Vietnam ([Hallin 1989](#)), the “CNN effect” in the aftermath of the Gulf War ([Robinson 1999](#)), or the importance of cable news coverage after 9/11 and the War on Terror ([Gadarian 2010](#)), the news media is generally seen as a particularly important actor, for three reasons. First, it serves as the primary conduit of political information for most Americans, particularly for foreign policy issues that are definitionally further removed from citizens’ daily lives ([Rosenau 1965](#)). Second, it is often understood to exert important effects on political attitudes, affecting not only what issues citizens think about, but how they think about them ([Iyengar and Kinder 1987](#), [Nelson, Clawson and Oxley 1997](#), [Hiscox 2006](#)), hence political scientists’ interests into the distinctive effects of things like visceral images of war on public opinion ([Gartner and Gelpi 2016](#)). Third, it functions as a strategic actor in its own right, without whom the public is unable to live up to its responsibilities under democratic theory or constrain foreign policy misadventures ([Baum and Potter 2015](#)).

Yet much of this literature is based on a key assumption: that the relevant media actors are located at home, rather than abroad. Theoretically, we tend to link the rise of the mass media to how states foster relationships with their *own* citizens ([Warren 2014](#)), rather than those in other countries; empirically, we tend to study the media in American foreign policy by coding the front pages of national papers like the *New York Times* or *Chicago Tribune* (e.g. [Krebs 2015](#)), or the content of national newscasts like those on ABC, CBS, and NBC (e.g. [Hayes and Guardino 2010](#)). Yet thanks to the technological changes of the digital era, Americans also have the ability to access foreign news, the implications of which have yet to be fully appreciated by political scientists.

A definitional point here is in order. Although the media effects and political communication literature sometimes uses the term “foreign news” to refer to news about foreign affairs more generally (see, for example, [Aalberg et al. 2013](#) or [Alasutari, Qadir and Creutz 2013](#)) or to news conveyed by foreign correspondents (as in [Bjork 1994](#) or [Hannerz 2012](#)), for the purposes of this article, we use the term to refer to the origin of the news source, rather than its content. We consider foreign news to be any type of news (political, current affairs, entertainment, finance, sports, etc.) presented in a media outlet that is owned and/or published

by a non-U.S. entity. A wide range of types of news fall into this category, including news produced by state-run media organizations targeted at their own domestic audiences, public diplomacy-oriented media organizations that are intended for consumption by foreign audiences, and news produced by private media companies, which may be targeted at the domestic population, foreign populations, or both.

To understand foreign news consumption, we offer a simple theoretical model that first sketches out the supply side of foreign news, positing why different types of news outlets might deliberately seek to draw international audiences. We then turn to the demand side of foreign news, positing why different types of citizens might turn to foreign news outlets to receive their information. The interaction between the supply and demand-side suggest a number of aggregate-level hypotheses about the types of foreign news outlets Americans are most likely to access, as well as a number of individual-level hypotheses about the types of Americans more likely to access foreign news.

## The Foreign News Supply Chain

Why might news outlets seek foreign audiences? The factors determining the supply dynamics of foreign news distributors depend upon the type of news outlet. In the case of privately-owned media companies, the primary impetus for building a foreign audience is the potential for increased profitability. Modern media companies must contend with the economic realities of the market, as existing literature in media studies and political communication makes clear ([McChesney 2004](#), [Croteau and Hoynes 2013](#)). For public diplomacy outlets, which are state-owned and targeted towards foreign audiences, the purpose of reaching foreigners is influence-driven. Government-run public diplomacy outlets, such as Germany's *Deutsche Welle*, China's *Global Times*, and Russia's *RT*, use publications or broadcasts, as well as online and social media resources, in order to influence the views of foreign audiences to the benefit of the sending country ([Schatz and Levine 2010](#), [Youmans and Powers 2012](#), [Golan, Manor and Arceneaux 2019](#)). One might envision a state's ability to garner foreign attention to its media as a measure of its international ideational power ([Carstensen and Schmidt 2016](#)). In simple terms, then, private media companies may pursue foreign audiences to attract greater economic profit, while public diplomacy outlets pursue foreign audiences to amass greater influence for their country among publics overseas. Both of these types of foreign media sources, as well as foreign sources primarily focused on domestic consumers, may also seek overseas consumption by relevant diasporas (see, e.g. [Sun 2009](#)).

Given these different types of players, a number of factors may determine the level of success of foreign media outlets in gaining transnational audiences, leading to a set of aggregate-level hypotheses. We argue

that media outlets from countries with larger proportions of English speakers will be more successful in attracting American consumers given that English is the most widely spoken language in the United States. Countries with larger numbers of English speakers will be home to larger numbers of media outlets that publish in English. The overlap in languages between their domestic consumers and potential consumers in the United States will give these countries a natural advantage in reaching Americans.<sup>7</sup>

**H1 (Proportion of English speakers)** - The total number of visits to a given country's news websites will be positively associated with the proportional size of the country's population of English speakers.

For state-owned outlets, the overall resources of the state will matter greatly. Resources are an important factor because a state's economic resources determine its capacity to develop its media environment. This idea tracks with realist ideations of power as dependent on resources (Morgenthau 1985, Waltz 2000). It is plausible to think that state resources are an important factor in the success of private media companies, as well. After all, the economic resources of states have direct influence upon domestic markets, including media markets.

**H2 (Resources)** - Greater state resources of media-producing countries will be positively associated with higher country-level rates of foreign news consumption among Americans.

Finally, we imagine that the size of a country's diaspora in the United States should matter to the success of most foreign media sources in the U.S. market. Research on the politics of immigrants shows that diaspora communities are often politically involved in their countries of origin, and information networks facilitate transnational engagement (DeSipio 2006, Sun 2009).

**H3 (U.S.-based diaspora size)** - The aggregate number of foreign news visits that countries receive will increase with the size of their diasporas in the United States.

## Determinants of Demand of Foreign News

Why might citizens consume foreign news? The public opinion and political communication literatures have traditionally seen *attentiveness* as a prerequisite for news consumption — perhaps most notably via the early notion of the “attentive public” (Almond 1950), the subset of the population that pays special attention to

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<sup>7</sup>This is not to say that we expect only English-language news sites to be accessed by Americans; some groups in the United States prefer non-English news. For example, Salzman (2014) finds that individuals claiming certain social identities within U.S. Latino populations prefer to consume Spanish-language news. Given trends like this one, we expect that non-English media outlets are also likely to find an audience among U.S. web users.

current affairs. Central to attentiveness, however, is selectivity: individuals have a choice about what news to consume, and what to ignore (Kinchla 1980, Baum 2011).<sup>8</sup>

Both motivational and situational factors can be used to explain selective attention to news. Motivational explanations, such as the “uses and gratifications” perspective on media use (Blumler and Katz 1974), argue that people choose particular types of media according to their own predilections and moods. Individuals may consume media for instrumental purposes, entertainment, or simply for leisure. Moreover, cues from the media itself, the interests of consumers, and the social environment of consumers may all shape the degree to which people pay attention to particular types of news (Graber 1988). Alternatively, situational explanations for selective attention may stem from one’s political beliefs and upbringing, the technology landscape, or the quality of supply (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013, Prior 2018). Importantly, not all those with an interest in the news may necessarily be *politically interested*: as Prior (2018) shows, interest in the news and interest in politics are positively correlated, but members of the public who pay attention to news vastly outnumber those who pay attention to politics. Individuals with interest in the news can include those solely interested in celebrity gossip, sports news, or soft news (Baum 2003).

Traditionally, theories of news consumption in the political communication literature focused on explaining attention to domestic news. This is logical, as the everyday political and popular culture to which most citizens are accustomed will be most aligned with narratives in the domestic media. Nevertheless, with the rise of the Internet, information and communications technologies (ICT) have made possible new types of information networking at the same time as they have made more information available to ordinary citizens (Fung, Russon Gilman and Shkabatur 2013). Under certain circumstances, news consumers may find that the type of news that best satisfies their interests comes from foreign outlets. As mentioned above, the first of these scenarios might arise among citizens who are migrants to the United States. For the same reasons that we expect non-migrant communities of Americans to turn first to U.S. news sources, migrant and diaspora communities may choose to collect some of their information from their country of origin.

Second, we argue that the ideological predispositions of consumers may affect their interest in foreign news. Research in the political psychology literature shows that ideological belief systems predict political attitudes broadly (i.e., Feldman 1988, Zaller 1992), and foreign policy attitudes, in particular (i.e., Hurwitz and Peffley 1987, Holsti 2004, Gries 2014). A plethora of ideological orientations can affect opinions about world events and reactions to media narratives, including personal values (Rathbun et al. 2016, Chu 2019),

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<sup>8</sup>Indeed, selectivity, or “the degree to which one may choose to process specific sources of information and ignore others” (Kinchla 1980: 214), is built into Baum (2011)’s definition of attentiveness, or being “cognizant of an object, and selectively process[ing] information about it” (p. 11).

moral foundations (Kertzer et al. 2014), attitudes towards of hierarchy (Rathbun 2007), and political knowledge (Chong and Druckman 2007). Ideological predispositions have also been shown to affect responses to foreign affairs-related media, specifically. For example, Hayes and Guardino (2011), demonstrate that pre-dispositions, or “the basic, relatively enduring orientations toward the political world that people form over time through socialization experiences involving family, peers, school, the workplace, longer-term mass media exposure, and other mechanisms,” shape levels of interest in foreign discourse in news about international affairs.

We predict that several individual-level characteristics will be related to foreign news consumption. First, we expect to see a relationship between individuals’ foreign policy orientations and their consumption of foreign news. Most contemporary models of foreign policy orientations in the United States are three-dimensional (Wittkopf 1990, Chittick, Billingsley and Travis 1995, Holsti 2004), suggesting that Americans’ underlying foreign policy preferences are structured based on their beliefs about the desirability and efficacy of the use of force (referred to as militant internationalism (MI)), their level of support for multilateral cooperation and participation in international institutions (referred to as cooperative internationalism (CI)), and their general belief about the extent to which the United States should be focused on problems at home rather than involved overseas (referred to as isolationism).<sup>9</sup> Given that both militant and cooperative internationalism constitute support for particular types of international involvement, and isolationism constitutes opposition to it, we expect that MI and CI will be positively associated to foreign news consumption, and isolationism negatively associated with it. This pattern is both because isolationism is traditionally associated with less political sophistication (Kertzer 2013), and because individuals who want their country to be less involved abroad are less likely to themselves consume foreign news products.

Likewise, since foreign news sites are definitionally sites that come from abroad, we expect that foreign news consumption will be related to individuals’ national identity conceptions, much as attitudes towards actors and objects associated with outgroups are more generally (Kinder and Kam 2010). In the public opinion literature in foreign policy, building on social identity theory (Brewer 1999) scholars typically differentiate between two different conceptions of nationalism: one referring to the extent to which individuals identify with their country and feel that their membership in the national community defines who they are (national attachment) and the other referring to the extent to which individuals see their country as superior to others (national chauvinism) (Herrmann, Isernia and Segatti 2009). We expect that both types of nationalism will be inversely related to foreign news consumption: staunch nationalists are less likely to

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<sup>9</sup>A similar structure has been found to underlie British, French, German, and Swedish foreign policy attitudes as well (Reifler, Scotto and Clarke 2011, Bjereld and Ekengren 1999, Gravelle, Reifler and Scotto 2017).

seek out news sources from overseas. Individuals who are low in national chauvinism are often thought of as cosmopolitans because they often identify with the international community as a whole instead ([Erkmen 2015](#)). We thus expect that the causes of correlates of cosmopolitanism more generally — from education, to international exchanges and travel abroad ([Deutsch 1953, Atkinson 2010](#)) — should also be more likely to seek out foreign news. Cosmopolitans aren't just more likely to be interested in news about international issues ([Gustafson 2009, Merton and Merton 1968](#)), but should also be more likely to choose foreign outlets to receive the news. These hypotheses are summarized below.

**H4a (MI and CI)** - Individual-level foreign news consumption will increase with militant internationalism, and the same will occur as cooperative internationalism scores increase.

**H4b (Isolationism)** - Individual-level foreign news consumption will decrease with isolationism.

**H4c (National chauvinism and national attachment)** - Individual-level foreign news consumption will decrease with national attachment and national chauvinism.

**H5 (Cosmopolitanism)** - Individual-level foreign news consumption will increase with cosmopolitanism.

Yet if individuals selectively attend to news sources, it follows that not all foreign news is created equal for American consumers. Instead, we expect that Americans differentiate between news sites based on their country of origin. First, at the aggregate level, we presume that news from countries with a similar political outlook as the United States will be more likely to convey political issues using ideas familiar to Americans, and thus, will attract more American consumers. This expectation is supported by previous work in public diplomacy that shows that messengers from countries sharing “political cultural congruency” with the receiving audience’s country tend to be more successful ([Entman 2008, Shearer et al. 2013](#)). At the individual level, we expect that citizens’ feelings towards specific countries will also shape their likelihood of consuming news from those countries: warm feelings towards particular countries should be positively associated with news consumption patterns.<sup>10</sup> Two testable hypotheses follow from these expectations.

**H6 (Country-level political agreement)** - The total number of foreign news visits that particular countries receive will increase with their level of political agreement with the United States.

**H7 (Individual-level feelings towards countries)** - An individual’s feelings towards a particular country will be positively related to the amount of news they consume from the country.

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<sup>10</sup>Country feeling thermometer scores should also capture preferences for countries with particular ideological, political, or economic characteristics, (i.e., preferences for countries with democratic governance, [Gries et al. \(2020\)](#)).

Similarly, we argue that features related to media quality and choice will affect foreign news consumption. Source credibility has been shown to increase the overall effectiveness of media sources (Hovland and Weiss 1951, Pornpitakpan 2004). We expect that news outlets from countries with higher levels of press freedom will be considered more credible by U.S. media consumers, and that they will thus attract more online visitors from the U.S. This transnational hypothesis differs from previous research on perceptions of media credibility among domestic audiences, which finds that the countries where citizens perceive the media to be less credible are the ones where there is greater press freedom (Soon and How Tan 2016, Johnson and Fahmy 2008). This finding, however, is potentially susceptible to concerns both about social desirability bias, and cross-national comparability (King et al. 2004). We thus believe Americans are more likely to select media outlets from countries with higher levels of press freedom.

The above hypotheses have all presumed that the Americans most likely to consume foreign news are internationalists and cosmopolitans, eager to engage with the broader world around them. Yet there is another group of citizens who is also likely to turn to foreign news, not out of a deep-seated globalism, but because of dissatisfaction with the media at home. This alternative hypothesis is also consistent with research on media substitution more generally (Waldfogel 2002, Lin 1994). In a similar vein, we expect that individuals who exhibit greater skepticism towards the U.S. media will be more likely to substitute foreign media outlets for domestic ones. Tsafati and Peri (2006) demonstrate this phenomenon of media skepticism leading to “extranational news consumption” in the Israeli context. This pattern could be due either to individuals believing the media at home is biased — consistent with attacks against the “mainstream media” by the Trump administration, who have been more supportive of media coverage by the Russian-backed news organization *RT*<sup>11</sup> — or just that foreign media is of higher quality. Recent polls have shown that some foreign media sources are held in great esteem by American news consumers. For example, a 2014 Pew Research Center poll found that the BBC earned the second-highest trust-to-distrust ratio among U.S. and British outlets after The Economist; however, the BBC vastly outranked The Economist in terms of recognizability, with 76% of respondents recognizing the BBC and only 34% of respondents recognizing The Economist (Mitchell 2014). These results indicate that the BBC may be seen as a foreign news source with greater trustworthiness in the eyes of Americans than most American media outlets.<sup>12</sup>

**H8 (Press freedom)** - Visits to news sites from individual countries will increase with higher country-level press freedom scores.

<sup>11</sup>See <https://www.npr.org/2016/12/15/505751335/-rt-america-the-one-news-outlet-for-which-trump-retains-an-unexpected-affinity>

<sup>12</sup>On the importance of trust in foreign policy attitudes more generally, see Brewer et al. (2004), Rathbun (2009), Nguyen and Bernauer (2019).

**H9 (Media skepticism)** - Individual-level visits to foreign news sites will be higher among individuals who are more skeptical of the U.S. media.

Finally, although the theoretical framework above is based on the paradigm of selective attention, online behavior is also characterized by incidental exposure ([Yadamsuren and Erdelez 2010](#)). It is thus also plausible that some individuals encounter foreign news not because they deliberately seek it out, but rather, because they happen to encounter it incidentally, and are insufficiently media literate to differentiate it from domestic news.

**H10 (Discernment)** - Less discerning media consumers will consume more foreign news.<sup>13</sup>

## Methodology

This study employs the data from an original nationally representative, seven-wave YouGov survey of American adults over a period of thirteen months. The first wave was fielded beginning in the spring of 2018, from April 23 - July 22 ( $N = 3224$ ), the second from August 28 - September 10 ( $N = 1339$ ), the third from October 5 - October 29 ( $N = 1180$ ), the fourth from October 30 - November 6 ( $N = 1289$ ), the fifth from December 20 - January 7, 2019 ( $N = 1300$ ), the sixth from January 24 - February 5, 2019 ( $N = 1324$ ), and the seventh from April 1 - 9 2019 ( $N = 1232$ ).<sup>14</sup> To obtain behavioral measures of media exposure, we integrate the survey data above with web tracking data (that is, all URLs respondents visit, rather than just domains) passively collected from participants' computers, tablets, and mobile devices through YouGov Pulse. All participants provided consent before installing passive metering software by Reality Mine, which tracks their complete web activity in real-time (apart from passwords and financial transactions, which are excluded from the data). As we show in Appendix §1, there is little evidence that respondents who consented to web tracking systematically differ from the population of American adults as a whole in terms of basic demographics, although as one might imagine, they appear to care slightly less about their data being collected on the internet than does the general population as a whole.

For the analyses in the paper, we constructed two databases of news sources: an original database of foreign news sites and an updated database of popular U.S. news sites. We then cross-referenced all respondents' web activity data with these databases in order to identify a full list of each respondent's foreign news and domestic news consumption.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>We will test for the hypothesis in future drafts of this paper.

<sup>14</sup>The large sample size for the first wave is due to a botched roll-out; the effective sample size for that wave is in line with those reported for subsequent waves.

<sup>15</sup>For the purposes of this study, we use web activity data between August 2018 and March 2019. Web activity before August

In order to build the foreign news database, we first compiled the most popular news websites from the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) multinational lists. In total, this yielded a set of over 800 newspapers from 83 countries.<sup>16</sup> When countries had more than ten top newspapers, only the first ten were added into the database. Subsequently, non-U.S. sites placing on Alexa's top 500 websites were added to the foreign news dictionary. The list was supplemented with public diplomacy focused news sources: government-sponsored websites aimed at foreign audiences.<sup>17</sup> Finally, prominent regional newspapers (AllAfrica, IRIN News-Africa) were added to the database.<sup>18</sup>

A number of coding choices were aimed at distinguishing foreign from U.S. news sites. First, when foreign websites had different versions (and different URLs) in different languages, all versions were included in the foreign news database. Second, when websites owned by foreign companies also had a U.S. front domain (for example, the U.S. version of guardian.co.uk is theguardian.com), we made an effort to include both the foreign and the U.S. domains in the database. However, when American sites took on foreign URL suffixes (i.e., huffingtonpost.co.uk), we did not code the sites as foreign news sites. For purposes of tractability, we also exclude social media pages of news outlets. For the purpose of comparison, this paper also presents statistics showing web visits to popular news sites in the U.S., based on an updated list of domains identified as “hard news” by [Bakshy, Messing and Adamic \(2015\)](#), who train a classifier on a comprehensive dataset of links shared on Facebook to identify the 500 most shared news sites on the social network in the United States. We describe the procedures we used to update the dataset, along with our URL segmentation procedure, in Appendix §2.

## Dependent Variable

The primary dependent variable for all analyses in this paper is the number of visits to foreign news sites. We estimate these counts in different ways depending on the level of analysis, either at the respondent-level, or at the country-level. Crucially, because these are behavioral measures from respondents' actual online

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2018 was collected via Wakoopa, a slightly different software, due to an internal processing switch at YouGov. The Wakoopa data is not as easily interpretable, and so for the present time, these data have been excluded.

<sup>16</sup>Countries included: Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China (including Taiwan and Hong Kong), Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Venezuela, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>17</sup>In order to find public diplomacy websites, we relied mainly on Internet searches. For each country in the world, the following five phrases were searched: “[country name] international broadcasting,” “[country name] international newspaper,” “[country name] public diplomacy newspaper,” “[country name] press agency,” and “[country name] public diplomacy broadcasting.”

<sup>18</sup>Regional newspaper outlets were compiled from ABYZ News Links, a commercial website that is referenced by the Library of Congress and several university libraries.

activity, we do not need to rely on self-report estimates of foreign media usage, which are likely inaccurate and prone to bias.

### Independent Variables

To test our aggregate-level hypotheses about the types of countries Americans are likely to access news from as a whole, we turn to a variety of data sources. We obtain a measure of each country's proportion of English speakers using the 19th edition of the Ethnologue language dataset, and measure state resources using logged 2018 gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of countries, as reported by the World Bank. In order to calculate each country's recent diaspora size in the U.S., we use the United Nations Population Division's 2019 estimates of migrant stock in the United States from each country in the world, although it should be noted that these numbers underestimate the full size of diaspora groups in the U.S. because they only include foreign-born residents. To proxy for country-level political alignment, we calculate the absolute distance between each country's 2018 ideal point score and the U.S. ideal point score in UNGA voting data from [Voeten, Strezhnev and Bailey \(2009\)](#). Finally, to measure press freedom, we turn to global performance indicators (GPis), which international actors utilize both to exert social pressure on governments and to extend added legitimacy to good actors ([Doshi, Kelley and Simmons 2019](#)). To measure the press freedom of countries in the data set, we use 2019 World Press Freedom Index scores as published by Reporters Sans Frontières (Reporters Without Borders).

To test our individual-level hypotheses about which types of respondents are more likely to access foreign news, we use a series of survey questions administered in the initial wave of the study. By utilizing survey questions administered at the beginning of the study, we ensure that our measures are not endogenous to the foreign media consumption we observe from respondents in subsequent periods. We measure respondents' foreign policy orientations using a six-item battery taken from [Kertzer et al. \(2014\)](#), asking respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements like "The best way to ensure world peace is through American military strength", "The United States needs to cooperate more with the United Nations", and "We should not think so much in international terms but concentrate more on our own national problems," which tap into militant internationalism (MI), cooperative internationalism (CI), and isolationism, respectively. We measure national attachment and national chauvinism using items derived from [Herrmann, Isernia and Segatti \(2009\)](#), which capture the extent to which respondents report that being American is an important part of their identity (e.g. "When someone says something bad about American people, how strongly do you feel it is as if they said something bad about you?"), and that the United States is better than other countries

(e.g. “How superior is the United States compared to other nations?”), respectively. To study the related concept of cosmopolitanism, we create a three-item ordinal scale based on whether respondents attended college ([Hainmueller and Hiscox 2006](#)), reported having traveled abroad, and reported being able to speak a second-language. To study the effects of country-specific attitudes, we also include feeling thermometer measures, in which respondents indicated how warmly or coldly they felt towards China, Russia, Mexico, Iran, and Canada. Finally, to measure negative attitudes towards the media, we use two items that each capture different ways respondents can be distrustful of the media. The first, *media disdain*, asks respondents whether they feel that news organizations “keep political leaders from doing their job” rather than “keep[ing] political leaders from doing things that shouldn’t be done”, on a five point scale. The more respondents reported feeling that media organizations keep leaders from doing their job, the more disdain they are coded as feeling. The second, *media bias*, asks respondents whether they feel that the news media “tend to favor the liberal side or tend to favor the conservative side.” We calculate our bias measure by creating a distance measure to indicate how biased respondents felt media organizations were in the direction opposite their self-reported ideology.

## Results

### How much foreign media do Americans consume?

We begin the presentation of our results with a description of the data. During the eight months of the study, our respondents accessed a total of roughly 61.5 million URLs. Of this total, only 0.2% of the visits went to foreign news sites (122,132 URLs). For comparison, 1.8% of the website visits were to websites in our U.S. news database (1,085,908 URLs). In total, our respondents visited 257 different foreign news sites.<sup>19</sup> As the heatmap in Figure 1 and ranking in Table 2 shows, these foreign news visits were not evenly distributed: visits to news sites from the United Kingdom made up 91.2% of all foreign news visits. Interestingly, as Table 1 shows, several prominent state-owned media websites, including the British BBC, Qatar’s Al Jazeera, France24, Canada’s CBC, and Russia’s RT appeared within the top 20 foreign news

<sup>19</sup>We carried out a data reduction exercise to analyze co-occurrences between foreign news site visits. Given the extremely sparse dataframe, which precluded traditional cluster and factor analysis from converging, we settled on a Latent Dirichelet Allocation (LDA) model, which political scientists typically use to analyze text-as-data and which shares many of the features of the data we analyze here: sparse dataframes with highly skewed count distributions. Rather than think of the analysis as a bag-of-words model, one might think of it in this context as a bag-of-news-outlets. Model fit statistics suggest the lowest topic solution fits the data the best, so we estimate an LDA model with two topics – one focusing largely on English-language outlets from Western Europe (The Guardian, BBC, The Sun, The Independent, Reuters, etc.), and another consisting of an array of foreign news outlets across Europe and Asia (The Hindu, The Times of India, Bild, Milliyet, etc.).

websites visited by respondents.<sup>20</sup>

Table 1: *Top 25 foreign news sites, ranked by all webpage visits*

No.	Website	Total URL Visits	Unique Page Visits	Unique Domain Visits	Country of the Website
1	Daily Mail	80,566	6,850	488	United Kingdom (UK)
2	The Guardian (.com)	13,771	5,308	433	United Kingdom (UK)
3	BBC (.com)	4,610	1,833	342	United Kingdom (UK)
4	BBC (.co.uk)	2,931	796	243	United Kingdom (UK)
5	The Sun (.co.uk)	2,232	507	210	United Kingdom (UK)
6	The Independent	2,076	658	327	United Kingdom (UK)
7	Reuters	1,761	767	242	United Kingdom (UK)
8	The Daily Telegraph	1,442	634	240	United Kingdom (UK)
9	Spiegel Online	1,242	889	16	Germany
10	France24	1,106	169	53	France
11	The Daily Mirror	1,020	515	182	United Kingdom (UK)
12	Al Jazeera English	1,002	133	68	Qatar
13	Daily Star	860	262	108	United Kingdom (UK)
14	Ynet	676	21	5	Israel
15	CBC	653	380	128	Canada
16	NewsAU	579	230	106	Australia
17	Ynet English	567	58	13	Israel
18	The Hindu	555	18	10	India
19	Gazeta Russia	334	117	4	Russia
20	RT	321	160	69	Russia
21	Haaretz English	239	99	47	Israel
22	Sputnik	178	134	46	Russia
23	The Toronto Star	155	74	51	Canada
24	Le Monde	152	15	3	France
25	South China Morning Post	143	79	47	China - Hong Kong

Table 2: *Top 15 country/region of origin counts and China, ranked by total webpage visits, with all popular news visit and all foreign news visit sums for comparison.*

No.	Type/Country of Website	Total Visits	Unique Page Visits	Unique Domain Visits	Prop. of Respondents Who Visited
	All US News Visits	1085908	193031	29720	0.901
	All Foreign News Visits	122132	22716	4611	0.621
1	United Kingdom (UK)	111422	18234	2898	0.583
2	Israel	1503	193	77	0.042
3	Germany	1370	974	63	0.041
4	France	1284	206	69	0.050
5	Qatar	1046	149	83	0.049
6	Canada	997	593	272	0.128
7	Russia	858	425	130	0.072
8	India	816	169	98	0.049
9	Australia	722	332	189	0.102
10	New Zealand	269	154	93	0.036
11	Ireland	228	174	120	0.066
12	Japan	172	113	31	0.013
13	China - Hong Kong	145	81	49	0.036
14	Turkey	136	127	12	0.008
15	Spain	126	64	28	0.015
23	China	47	42	16	0.011

<sup>20</sup>A complete list of foreign news visits is available in Appendix §2.

Our country-level hypotheses in this study predicted that indicators of similarity – such as political agreement at the United Nations or commonality in the prevalence of English speakers – would predict foreign news consumption. Indeed, the United Kingdom, Israel, and Germany top the list of foreign news site origin. However, two surprising countries appear in the top rankings: Qatar is the fifth most frequently visited country for its online news, and Russia is the seventh most frequently visited. The presence of these two countries atop the list indicates that their outsized attempts at media influence have made them more successful than most other countries in reaching American citizens. On the other hand, despite a large-scale effort, China’s global media efforts appear not to have borne much fruit in the U.S. market. All of the country’s media websites received only 47 visits throughout the eight-month observation period for the entire sample.

Moreover, when we formally estimate a negative binomial model in Table 4 to determine the associations between country-level characteristics and foreign news visits to each country, we fail to find evidence in favor of a number of our hypotheses. It is not the case, for example, that Americans are significantly more likely to access foreign news sites from countries with a higher GDP per capita. We predicted in H6 that political agreement between countries, measured by the distance between ideal points of the two countries’ UN voting scores, would increase with foreign news consumption. In actuality, though, the results show the opposite effect. Greater news consumption is associated with lower levels of political agreement, reinforcing the extent to which a number of the countries on the list are punching above their weight in terms of the American audience they attract. We do find support for H8, in that press freedom is positively associated with web traffic.

To put the volume of our respondents’ foreign news visits into perspective, we also include statistics for respondents’ visits to US news websites. For example, the number of visits to the UK’s Daily Mail (80,566) made up roughly one third of the number of online visits to Fox News (226,400). Visits to the Al Jazeera English website (1,002) were about the same as visits to the Boston Globe (1,024), while visits to Russia’s RT (321) were roughly equal in quantity to visits to InfoWars (306). Alternatively, visits to France’s Le Monde website (152) amounted to approximately the same number of visits that local TV news stations in Dallas (124) and Pittsburgh (122) received by our respondents. Tallies of the top visits to popular U.S. news sites, grouped according to different types of media, can be found in Table 3.

No.	U.S. National TV News Websites	Total URL Visits	Unique Page Visits	Unique Domain Visits
1	Fox News	226,400	19,829	700
2	CNBC	73,711	1,623	433
3	CNN	45,499	8,826	674
4	NBC News	8,705	2,759	518
5	CBS News	7,030	2,232	487
6	ABC News	4,345	972	397
7	PBS	4,214	1,500	259
8	MSNBC	4,172	1,643	191
9	The Blaze	3,346	816	106
10	Today Show	1,257	647	220
11	C-Span	523	143	86
12	Good Morning America	176	75	28
13	Democracy Now	95	55	34
14	End Of The Age	5	3	3

No.	U.S. Local TV News Websites	Total URL Visits	Unique Page Visits	Unique Domain Visits
1	WRAL Raleigh	3,299	321	83
2	NBC Los Angeles	3,159	85	51
3	WFLA Tampa Bay	2,847	1,303	50
4	NBC New York	2,738	165	114
43	WFAA Dallas	124	53	22
44	Pix 11 Pittsburgh	122	61	39
45	Local 4 Detroit	112	73	45
46	WGTV Chicago	110	76	61
85	My Fox Alabama	7	6	4
86	Fox Baltimore	7	6	6
87	CBS Local Seattle	2	1	1
88	My Fox Twin Cities	1	1	1

No.	U.S. News Websites	Total URL Visits	Unique Page Visits	Unique Domain Visits
1	ORA.tv	47,406	1,191	286
2	Huffington Post	36,207	7,165	554
3	Daily Kos	28,493	4,907	164
4	Politico	11,597	2,435	350
84	Truth Out	226	142	31
85	Eagle Rising	221	43	18
86	The Federalist Papers	218	115	31
87	NRA-ILA	214	52	27
167	Live Action News	1	1	1
168	Patriot Update	1	1	1
169	Attn:	1	1	1
170	Occupy Democrats	1	1	1

No.	U.S. Newspaper Websites	Total URL Visits	Unique Page Visits	Unique Domain Visits
1	NY Times	91,186	12,075	714
2	Washington Post	49,978	7,859	659
3	USA Today	16,182	3,421	641
4	Chicago Tribune	8,049	2,397	266
15	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	1,320	209	75
16	Detroit Free Press	1,292	432	132
17	Baltimore Sun	1,041	620	79
18	Boston Globe	1,024	427	157
19	Miami Herald	885	358	183
30	Madison.com	80	34	20
31	Stripes	65	39	36
32	Navy Times	53	31	18
33	Marine Corps Times	27	19	18

Table 3: Popular news tables for comparison. Visit counts for U.S. national TV news, local TV news, news websites, and newspapers, divided into highest, middle, and lowest visit counts.

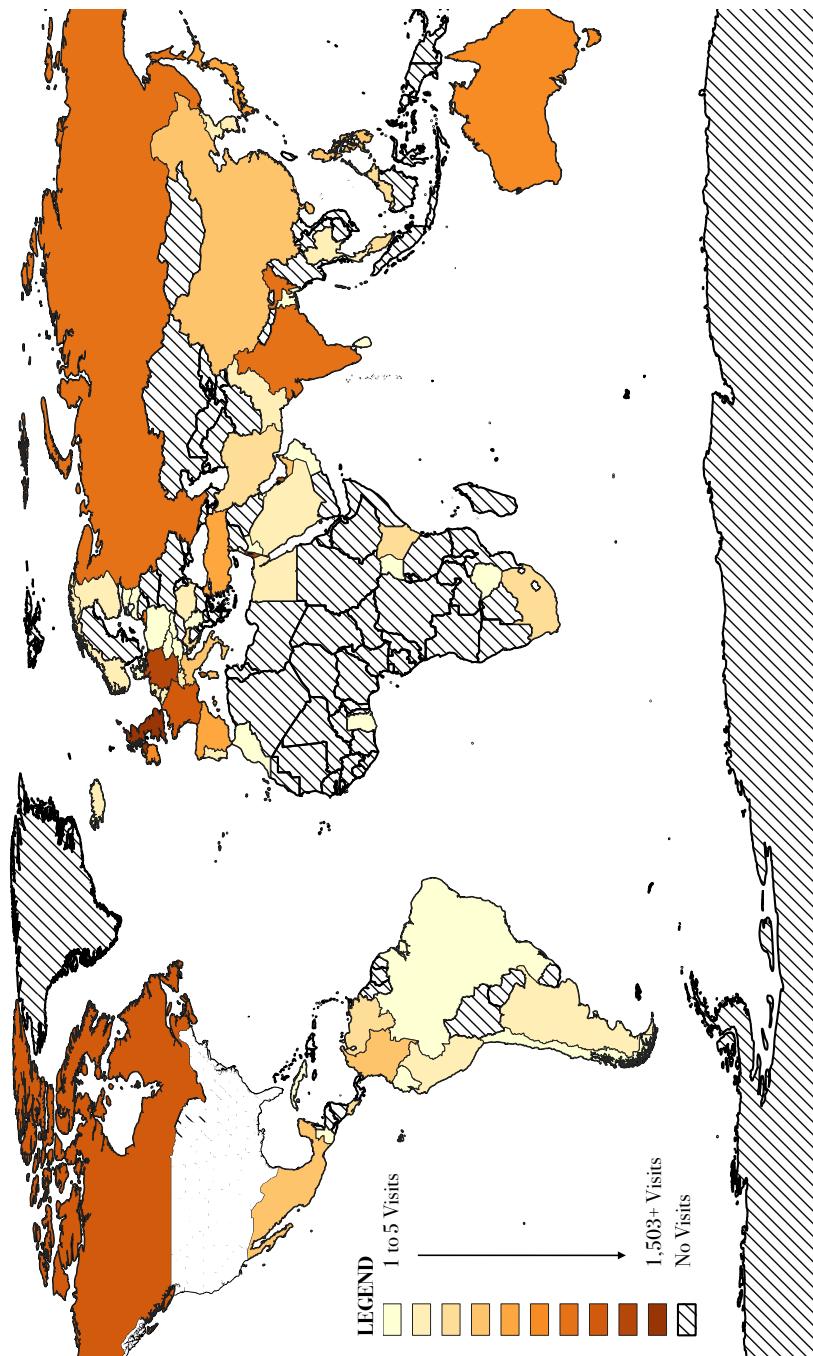


Figure 1: *Map of URL Visits to Foreign Websites*. Map includes all web visits from August 2018 to March 2019. Overall, websites from 69 foreign countries and territories were visited. Regional foreign websites (i.e., pan-African news websites) are not included in this map.

Table 4: Negative binomial regressions testing country-level relationships.

	Negative Binomial Models:					
	Visits to each country					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Internet penetration	-0.002 (0.018)	0.003 (0.0241)	0.016 (0.015)	0.023 (0.016)	0.032** (0.015)	-0.009 (0.024)
log(Secure servers)	0.569*** (0.216)	0.165 (0.218)	0.389** (0.164)	0.311 (0.205)	0.282* (0.155)	0.639** (0.314)
log(Population)	1.505*** (0.177)	1.500*** (0.180)	1.074*** (0.320)	1.467*** (0.179)	1.780*** (0.202)	1.678*** (0.367)
Literacy rate	0.056 (0.052)	0.0451 (0.041)	0.007 (0.042)	0.0618 (0.041)	0.048 (0.035)	0.092 (0.063)
Prop. English speakers	-3.562 (2.177)					-1.789 (2.211)
log(GDP per capita)		0.795 (0.729)				0.120 (0.739)
log(Migrants)			0.443 (0.309)			0.226 (0.298)
UN ideal point dist.				0.168 (0.527)		1.468** (0.683)
Press freedom					0.066*** (0.022)	0.078** (0.039)
Constant	-32.155*** (6.002)	-36.102*** (6.304)	-26.218*** (5.395)	-32.684*** (5.678)	-34.309*** (4.366)	-44.127*** (10.039)
Observations	37	77	51	78	51	27
Log Likelihood	-67.84005	-140.3173	-113.9466	-140.4664	-114.947	-62.81539
$\theta$	1.32	0.373	0.527	0.367	0.486	1.94
Akaike Inf. Crit.	149.68010	294.6346	241.8931	294.9328	241.893	147.63079
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	160.95653	311.0413	255.4159	311.4298	241.893	161.88499

Note:

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

These topline results make clear that interest in foreign news was heavily skewed towards British news, but not solely focused on Western sources, and consisted of a mix of private and state-owned news entities. Moreover, although foreign news sites appear to have a smaller audience in the United States than many of the top domestic news sites, they nonetheless attract an audience, with some of the foreign news websites in the database receiving more web traffic than popular U.S. news websites during the same period. We now turn to the question of who the respondents accessing these sites are.

## Who accesses foreign news?

In order to gain a clearer picture of who accesses foreign news, we provide negative binomial regression results for both foreign news consumption and domestic news consumption in Table 5. Model 1 estimates a baseline model with general demographics, model 2 adds political variables, and model 3 adds a set of dichotomous variables capturing respondents' religious affiliations;<sup>21</sup> to provide a sense of how the data-generating process for foreign news consumption differs from consumption of its domestic counterpart, we repeat the same analysis for domestic news consumption in models 4-6. In all cases, we control for respondents' baseline levels of internet usage, to avoid conflating interest in the news with web activity more generally.

In some ways the results suggest that the audience of foreign news looks similar to that of domestic news: individuals who report more interest in politics, for example, are more likely to consume both types of news, as are individuals who score higher in political knowledge. Men consume significantly higher amounts of both types of news than women do, as do wealthier respondents.

Yet the regression table also reveals a few key differences in the foreign news and U.S. news audiences. For instance, age is a significant predictor of both foreign news and U.S. popular news consumption. However, the trends move in opposite directions: while foreign news consumers tend to be relatively younger, domestic news consumers are more likely to be older. Furthermore, having an advanced education has a significant positive effect on foreign news consumption, but it does not have such an effect on domestic news consumption once other forms of political sophistication are being controlled for. Foreign news consumers are less likely to be employed, while there is no similar trend for domestic news consumers. Though partisanship loses significance when religious affiliation is being controlled for (reflecting the tendency for self-identified Born Again Christians to be significantly less likely to consume domestic news), in general Republicans are less likely to consume domestic news than Democrats are. However, there are no significant effects of party ID on foreign news consumption. Finally, while white respondents are significantly less likely to consume foreign news than respondents of other races, race has no consistent significant effect on domestic news consumption.<sup>22</sup>

In Table 6, we present the results of four negative binomial models intended to test the individual-level hypotheses in the paper. Our findings show that several individual-level indicators are significantly correlated with foreign news consumption, but not always in the expected direction. For instance, we

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<sup>21</sup>The descriptor of "Christian" includes those who indicated that they were Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, or Eastern or Greek Orthodox. Respondents were asked separately if they were born again using the Pew Research Center wording: "Would you describe yourself as a born-again or evangelical Christian, or not?" The correlation between those who fit into the aggregated "Christian" category and those who indicated that they were born again is 0.40.

<sup>22</sup>On race in public opinion in foreign policy, see [Nincic and Nincic \(2002\)](#), [Baker \(2015\)](#), [Prather \(2020\)](#)

Table 5: Correlates of foreign and domestic U.S. news consumption

	Negative Binomial Models:					
	Foreign News Visits			Domestic U.S. News Visits		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Some college	1.081*** (0.215)	0.895*** (0.216)	0.766*** (0.222)	0.508*** (0.143)	0.249* (0.143)	0.153 (0.146)
College/university	0.743*** (0.197)	0.536*** (0.198)	0.549*** (0.203)	0.389*** (0.132)	0.180 (0.133)	0.075 (0.135)
Postgraduate	1.065*** (0.235)	0.902*** (0.235)	0.863*** (0.241)	0.355** (0.152)	0.146 (0.151)	0.011 (0.154)
Male	0.839*** (0.13)	0.674*** (0.134)	0.658*** (0.135)	0.531*** (0.091)	0.360*** (0.093)	0.378*** (0.094)
Birth year	1.529*** (0.375)	2.256*** (0.391)	2.010*** (0.396)	-1.257*** (0.231)	-0.797*** (0.235)	-0.923*** (0.236)
Party ID	-0.167 (0.192)	-0.107 (0.190)	0.112 (0.199)	-0.287** (0.121)	-0.212* (0.121)	-0.029 (0.129)
White	-0.391** (0.178)	-0.508*** (0.175)	-0.515*** (0.175)	0.391*** (0.115)	0.141 (0.119)	0.119 (0.120)
Income	2.704*** (0.333)	2.140*** (0.338)	2.147*** (0.344)	1.117*** (0.223)	0.779*** (0.219)	0.808*** (0.217)
Employed	-0.766*** (0.159)	-0.830*** (0.156)	-0.865*** (0.158)	-0.077 (0.103)	-0.112 (0.101)	-0.092 (0.101)
Political Knowledge		2.202*** (0.481)	2.063*** (0.491)		2.162*** (0.322)	2.033*** (0.322)
Political Interest		1.204*** (0.296)	1.175*** (0.306)		0.885*** (0.194)	0.836*** (0.198)
Christian			-0.428*** (0.143)			-0.227** (0.101)
Born Again			-0.229 (0.175)			-0.306*** (0.112)
Jewish			-0.203 (0.345)			-0.251 (0.228)
Muslim			-3.021** (1.235)			-0.924 (0.817)
Buddhist			0.481 (0.694)			0.866** (0.414)
Hindu			-1.991 (1.965)			0.655 (1.398)
log(Total URL Visits)	1.170*** (0.041)	1.142*** (0.041)	1.139*** (0.041)	0.926*** (0.023)	0.915*** (0.023)	0.924*** (0.023)
Constant	-10.737*** (0.545)	-13.355*** (0.669)	-12.824*** (0.678)	-3.921*** (0.309)	-6.223*** (0.375)	-5.915*** (0.392)
Observations	1,146	1,133	1,133	1,146	1,133	1,133
Log Likelihood	-3714.261	-3656.683	-3647.554	-7273.08	-7154.543	-7140.332
\thetaeta	0.245	0.259	0.264	0.477	0.510	0.520
Akaike Inf. Crit.	7452.522	7341.366	7335.108	14570.16	14337.086	14320.664
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	7513.051	7411.822	7435.761	14630.69	14407.542	14421.316

Note: Negative binomial regression models. \* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01

find mixed results for H4. In agreement with H4b and H4c, foreign news consumption is significantly and negatively correlated with isolationism, national attachment, and national chauvinism. Isolationists and nationalists are significantly less likely to consume foreign news. However, against H4a, we find no evidence that militant internationalism is significantly correlated with foreign news consumption, and the correlation between cooperative internationalism and foreign news consumption is significant but *negative*, implying that more multilaterally-minded people are less rather than more likely to turn to foreign sources to get their news.

Models 3-4 find evidence in favor of H5, as individuals with higher levels of cosmopolitanism are more likely to consume foreign news. On the other hand, we find mixed results for H9. A belief that the media interferes with politics, which we refer to as media disdain in the table, is associated with less foreign news consumption. This finding goes against our expectations. Perceptions of media bias is associated with greater foreign news consumption in the standalone regression in Model 2 of Table 6, but not when foreign policy orientations and nationalism are being controlled for. In supplementary analyses, we find evidence of a statistically significant positive interaction term between the two media variables: those respondents who express disdain for the media and perceive it as biased are significantly more likely to consume foreign news.

Finally, we turn to the effects of the feeling thermometers. We argued that individuals who feel warmly towards particular foreign countries are more likely to consume foreign news from that country. Of the five countries for which we have feeling thermometers, only two of these countries attracted large enough numbers of foreign news visits to plausibly test the effects of H7: Canada and Russia. We test the hypothesis in Table 7. For both of these two countries, H7 holds, as individual-level feelings towards the countries are positively associated with consumption of news from the country, although the correlation appears to be slightly stronger for Russia. It should be noted here that these feeling thermometers do not have a similar effect in models predicting consumption of news from other countries. In a model predicting consumption of news from the United Kingdom, the Canada feeling thermometer is negative and statistically significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level. Similarly, in a model predicting consumption of Qatari news, the Russia feeling thermometer is negative and not statistically significant.

## Conclusion

Our research yields key insights into the dynamics that undergird foreign news consumption in the United States. Similar to other news consumers, American consumers of foreign news exhibit a higher interest in

Table 6: Correlates of foreign news consumption

	<i>Foreign News Visits</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Some college	0.841*** (0.218)	0.987*** (0.216)	0.991*** (0.215)	0.658*** (0.220)
College/university	0.587*** (0.202)	0.715*** (0.199)	0.154 (0.270)	0.045 (0.264)
Postgraduate	0.834*** (0.241)	0.954*** (0.234)	0.417 (0.308)	0.239 (0.307)
Male	0.764*** (0.136)	0.658*** (0.132)	0.821*** (0.129)	0.542*** (0.138)
Birth year	1.166*** (0.406)	1.379*** (0.373)	1.470*** (0.383)	1.256*** (0.402)
Party ID	0.063 (0.256)	0.472* (0.249)	-0.163 (0.189)	0.366 (0.270)
White	-0.467** (0.181)	-0.362** (0.179)	-0.294 (0.180)	-0.287 (0.179)
Income	2.427*** (0.340)	2.608*** (0.330)	2.466*** (0.159)	2.295*** (0.338)
Employed	-0.661*** (0.165)	-0.629*** (0.159)	-0.763*** (0.017)	-0.628*** (0.161)
MI	-0.073 (0.323)			0.147 (0.318)
CI	-1.265*** (0.310)			-1.435*** (0.354)
Isolationism	-0.714*** (0.255)			-0.616** (0.249)
Nat. Attachment	-1.180*** (0.375)			-0.937** (0.381)
Nat. Chauvinism	-0.914** (0.424)			-0.689* (0.415)
Media Bias		0.560** (0.229)		0.367 (0.236)
Media Disdain		-1.614*** (0.250)		-1.465*** (0.271)
Cosmopolitanism			1.207*** (0.379)	1.040*** (0.372)
log(Total URL Visits)	1.141*** (0.042)	1.153*** (0.041)	1.169*** (0.041)	1.136*** (0.004)
Constant	-7.788*** (0.765)	-10.482*** (0.552)	-10.937*** (0.556)	-8.133*** (0.041)
Observations	1,117	1,117	1,146	1,092
Log Likelihood	-3634.027	-3646.194	-3709.139	-3571.240
$\theta$	0.255	0.258	0.248	0.269
Akaike Inf. Crit.	7302.055	7320.387	7444.279	7182.481
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	7387.367	25390.645	7509.851	7282.396

Note: Negative binomial regressions. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Table 7: Negative binomial regressions to assess the effect of feeling thermometers on consumption of news from Canada and Russia.

	<i>Negative Binomial Models:</i>	
	Canadian news sites	Russian news sites
	(1)	(2)
Some college	0.171 (0.415)	-0.305 (0.681)
College/university	0.554 (0.389)	0.968 (0.612)
Postgraduate	0.119 (0.448)	1.184* (0.662)
Male	0.396 (0.243)	1.376*** (0.415)
Birth year	1.430** (0.660)	2.819** (1.219)
Party ID	0.005 (0.375)	1.081* (0.641)
White	0.478 (0.352)	1.678*** (0.593)
Income	-0.482 (0.672)	1.823* (0.990)
Employed	0.243 (0.288)	-0.859** (0.426)
Country feeling thermometer	1.087* (0.643)	1.612** (0.756)
log(Total URL Visits)	0.917*** (0.099)	0.807*** (0.148)
Constant	-12.652*** (1.331)	-15.028*** (2.038)
Observations	1,132	1,117
Log Likelihood	-729.3728	-453.3167
$\theta$	0.103	0.0483
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1484.7457	932.6335
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	1550.1583	997.8727

*Note:*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

politics and a higher level of political knowledge than do non-consumers. However, several factors set foreign news consumers apart. They are, on average, younger and less white than domestic news consumers. They are more likely to be cosmopolitans than consumers of domestic news are, with warm feelings towards the countries that publish the news they consume. Yet we also find some evidence that they tend to perceive the media as biased against them, and while countries with higher press freedom receive greater numbers of online news visitors from the U.S., so too do countries with lower levels of political agreement with the United States.

Our paper complicates the prevailing narrative within the media effects literature, which tends to focus on the political importance of the domestic, partisan media landscape of the U.S. ([Arceneaux and Johnson 2013](#), [Robinson 2001](#)). Instead, our findings suggest that 62% of our nationally representative sample accessed foreign news sites online, and that a small but significant number of foreign news websites penetrate the information sphere from beyond the political binary of the domestic media. These foreign news sites engage the same “attentive public” that has traditionally been imagined as beholden to the influence of domestic media organizations: these news consumers are politically engaged, knowledgeable about current affairs, and they feel that the media has a role to play in politics. Yet they may also be skeptical of the domestic media due to a perceived bias against their own political views.

Moreover, our study contributes to research on the impact of foreign elites upon U.S. public opinion. Previous work has shown that individual-level characteristics such as partisanship, ideology, education, and political knowledge impact the effectiveness of foreign discourse on public opinion in the U.S. public (i.e., [Hayes and Guardino 2011](#)). Our study shows the disproportionate effects of cosmopolitanism on interest in foreign news, thus expanding upon the range of ideological characteristics shown to affect attention to foreign elite discourse. Our findings suggest it is the individuals with greater interest in international affairs that seek information from foreign sources. Future work might investigate whether their consumption of foreign news facilitates deeper transnational effects, such as political socialization or norms diffusion ([Risse and Sikkink 1999](#), [Velasquez 2012](#)).

The findings in this paper speak directly to lively, ongoing U.S. political debates over the extent to which foreign media organizations from authoritarian countries have gained traction in the U.S. On one side of the issue, some prominent Washington editorialists have scoffed at the idea that Russian or Chinese media organizations might garner widespread attention in the U.S.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, U.S. lawmakers have already begun making efforts to limit the influence of outlets such as Qatar’s Al Jazeera or Russia’s Sputnik

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<sup>23</sup>See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/01/12/if-russia-today-is-moscows-propaganda-arm-its-not-very-good/>

through government offices that monitor and oversee certain foreign media operations in the U.S.<sup>24</sup>

Our study indicates that both Qatar and Russia have seen some success in reaching American audiences. At the national level, their online reach appears to be on par with local news outlets in major U.S. cities, and sometimes outperforms them. At the same time, the reach of most foreign news organizations still remains much lower than that of national news organizations. Moreover, although the internet is the primary way that many of these foreign outlets reach American audiences, many domestic news sources have other means available: domestic newspapers also have print subscribers, and domestic TV and radio stations can connect with audiences over the air rather than just online. Moreover, despite significant resources being spent by the Chinese government on such efforts, Chinese news outlets are not attracting Americans in large numbers.

Our study contributes not only to the pressing policy issues that exist at the intersection of national security, politics, and competition in the information realm, but also to a scholarly understanding of the efficacy of mediated public diplomacy. Our findings challenge the scholarly wisdom on public diplomacy, which presumes that public diplomacy via media organizations will be most successful at reaching foreign publics of countries that are politically and culturally congruent with the sending country (Entman 2008, Sheaffer et al. 2013). While it is true that the vast majority of foreign news consumed in the United States comes from a close ally – the United Kingdom – our findings also show that some countries with very different viewpoints than America’s are successful at reaching American news consumers, too. While news consumption does not imply rote agreement, it is a necessary predecessor to it. The high rates of Russian and Qatari news consumption in our sample make way for geopolitical gains in discursive and ideational power (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016). This paper opens the door to future research on the political effects of mediated public diplomacy, which might follow from similar studies that have already been done in this field (i.e., Carter and Carter 2019, Fisher 2020). More importantly, it lays the foundation for broader inquiry into the use of transnational media as a tool of political influence in international relations.

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<sup>24</sup>See both [https://www.cotton.senate.gov/?p=press\\_release&id=1161](https://www.cotton.senate.gov/?p=press_release&id=1161) and <https://thehill.com/business-a-lobbying/business-a-lobbying/360912-russian-news-outlet-sputnik-registers-with-doj-as>

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