Harnessing Backlash: How Leaders Can Benefit from Antagonizing Foreign Actors

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- International public diplomacy is generally understood as an attempt to increase foreign goodwill and cooperation.

- The study of diplomacy has largely focused on states' ability to use "cheap talk" - which does not have any inherent costs for the speaker - to communicate with or manipulate their international negotiating partners, in spite of strong incentives to misrepresent their interests. These studies are unified by their assumption that public diplomacy is intended to increase positive foreign opinion for the state or the state's preferred policies.

- While diplomats nearly always claim to be seeking attraction, leaders also commonly elicit negative reactions from foreign publics. To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to consider alternative goals for actions that look like public diplomacy but have the opposite effect.

- This paper argues that intentionally provoking a backlash from a valuable foreign actor, leaders can exchange foreign condemnation for an increase in domestic support. Author refer to this as "strategic antagonism".

- A new mechanism through which agency loss can result in noncooperative international outcomes that is distinct from the logic of diversionary war. Rather than generating an immediate military threat that evokes nationalism and unites domestic support, leaders can use strategic antagonism to pay a cost in terms of future international cooperation in order to signal commitment to a policy preferred by a specific domestic constituency.

- With the rise of populism around the globe, the use of strategic antagonism may become an even more fruitful tool as leaders try to signal their "outsider" credentials and convince voters that they do not conduct "politics as usual".

- Hypothesis: Leaders can intentionally provoke a foreign backlash to gain domestic support, particularly when domestic audiences have policy preferences opposing those of the foreign target.

- Case: In 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled to the United States to oppose a multilateral agreement with Iran, only to infuriate the Obama administration and polarize US support for Israel. Although risky, Netanyahu's strategic antagonism appears to have paid large dividends, as he won an extremely tight election the following week and was successful in forming a right-wing coalition government.

Data

Responses from individuals surveyed just before and just after Netanyahu's visit to show that the speech had the predicted effect on public opinion within key subsets of both the Israeli and US publics.

- `data_US`: 4866 obs. of 12 variables. Gallup and Pew each ran one survey in the weeks before the speech and in the weeks after. Data are from the Roper iPoll Center.

- `data_INES`: 174 obs. of 7 variables. Data are from the 2015 Israel National Election Survey.

- Analysis of change in American public opinion pre and post Netanyahu's speech.

$$\text{Netanyahu Approval} \sim \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{After Speech}$$
$$+ \beta_2 \times \text{IV} + \beta_3 \times \text{After Speech} \times \text{IV}$$
$$+ \beta_4 \times \text{X},$$

where X is a vector of control variable and IV is a categorical independent variable indicating the respondent's party, the key subgroup being Americans who identify as Democrats (Democrat).

- Probit model is used to analyse data.

```
1 model1 <- glm(favorable_netanyahu ~ post_visit*party + male + church_attend +
      college + income + age + white + ideology + jewish, family=binomial(link
      ='probit'), data=data_US)
```
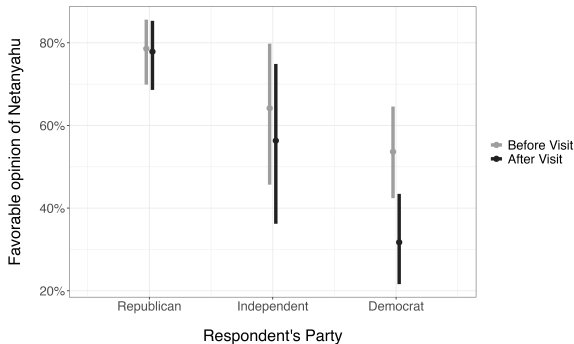
Figure: American Public Opinion

Model 1 shows that average American opinion of Netanyahu became more unfavorable following his speech. Republicans did not significantly change their approval of Netanyahu, while Democrats decreased their approval of Netanyahu by 21.1%. Vertical bars are 95% confidence intervals. The decrease within Democrats is statistically significant $p < 0.05$.

- Focus on American Democrats and their reaction to Netanyahu's speech.

$$\text{Netanyahu Approval} \sim \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{After Speech}$$
$$+ \beta_2 \times \text{IV} + \beta_3 \times \text{After Speech} \times \text{IV}$$
$$+ \beta_4 \times \text{X},$$

where `X` is a vector of control variable and `IV` is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent expressed approval of President Obama (`Approves of Obama`).

- Probit model is used to analyse data.

```
1  model2 <- glm(favorable_netanyahu~ post_visit*approve_obama + male + church_
       attend + college + income + age + white + ideology + jewish, family=
       binomial(link='probit'), data=data_US)
```
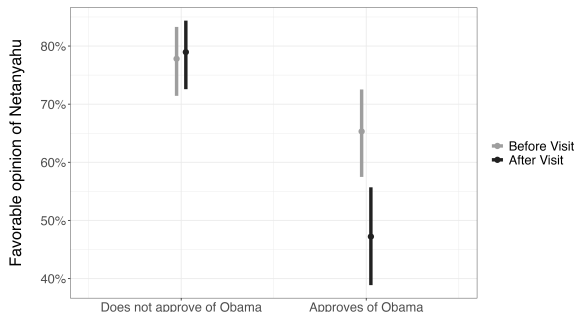
Figure: American Democrats Opinion

Model 2 shows that Americans that did not approve of Obama did not change their favorability towards Netanyahu following his speech, while Americans that approved of Obama decreased their favorability rating of Netanyahu by 17.1% $p < 0.05$. Vertical bars are 95% confidence intervals.

- Examination of the shift in Israeli public opinion towards a Likud-led coalition.

$$\text{Support Likud Coalition} \sim \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{After Speech}$$
$$+ \beta_2 \times \text{Coalition vote in 2013}$$
$$+ \beta_3 \times \text{After Speech} \times \text{Coalition vote in 2013}$$
$$+ \beta_4 \times \text{X},$$

where X is a vector of control variable, `After Speech` is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent was surveyed after Netanyahu's speech, `Coalition vote in 2013` is dummy variable indicating whether the respondent supported one of right-wing parties in the 2013 Knesset election.

- Linear model is used to analyze data.

```
1  model3 <- lm( Likud ~ vote_2013 * after_visit + age + sex + jewish + upper_class
       , data = data_INES)
```
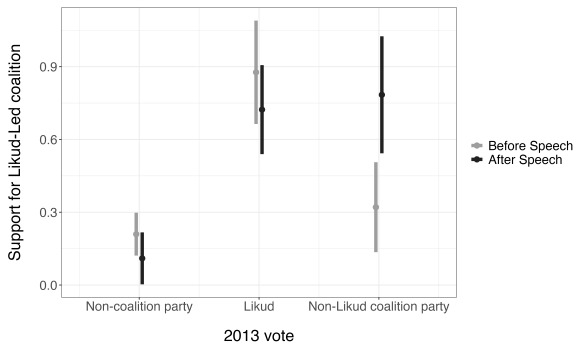
Figure: Israeli Public Opinion

Model 3 shows that Israelis who voted for a right-wing coalition party in 2013 increased their support for a Likud-led coalition in the period following Netanyahu's speech $p < 0.05$. Vertical bars are 95% confidence intervals.

Interaction terms can make the interpretation of the model coefficients more complex. The effect of one predictor depends on the level of the other variable it interacts with. So, instead multiplicative model I decided to run additive.

- Model 3 with interaction term

```
1  model_with_interaction <- lm(Likud ~ vote_2013*after_visit + age + sex +
       jewish + upper_class, data = data_INES)
```

- Model 3a without interaction term

```
1  model_without_interaction <- lm(Likud ~ vote_2013 + after_visit + age + sex +
       jewish + upper_class, data = data_INES)
```

- Running stargazer() function to print the estimated coefficients (Table 1)

```
1  stargazer(model_with_interaction, model_without_interaction)
```

Table 1: Models Comparison

	Dependent variable:	
	Likud	
	Model 3	Model 3a
vote_2013Likud	0.667***	0.623***
	(0.126)	(0.090)
vote_2013Non-Likud coalition	0.111	0.311***
	(0.113)	(0.094)
after_visitAfter Speech	−0.100	−0.030
	(0.074)	(0.064)
age	−0.005**	−0.006***
	(0.002)	(0.002)
sexFemale	0.035	0.051
	(0.062)	(0.063)
jewish	0.227***	0.219**
	(0.083)	(0.085)
upper_class	−0.183**	−0.193***
	(0.072)	(0.073)
vote_2013Likud:after_visitAfter Speech	−0.054	
	(0.173)	
vote_2013Non-Likud coalition:after_visitAfter Speech	0.563***	
	(0.186)	
Constant	0.290***	0.300***
	(0.111)	(0.113)

- The presence of interaction terms allows for the examination of how the effect of `vote_2013` categories on Likud changes before and after the speech (`after_visit`). The significant interaction between `vote_2013Non-Likud coalition` and `after_visitAfter Speech` indicates that for voters in the non-Likud coalition, the effect of the speech is important (statistically differantiable from zero), suggesting that these voters' support for Likud changes differently after the speech, compared to voters not in this category or time period.

- By removing the interaction terms, each predictor's effect is considered independently of the levels of other variables. This means that the Model 3a no longer accounts for the combined effect of voting behavior in 2013 and the timing relative to the speech. This model assumes the effect of voting behavior and the timing of the speech (before/after) on Likud support is constant, not influenced by the combination of these factors.
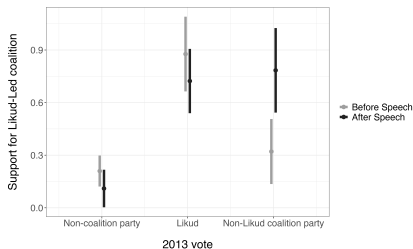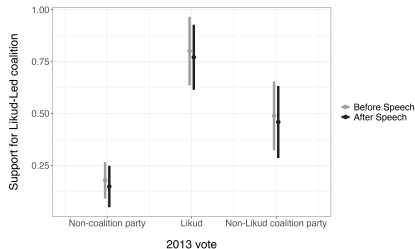
Figure: Model with interaction

Figure: Model without interaction

The removal of interaction term may overlook important dynamics between the time of the speech and prior voting behavior. The multiplicative Model 3 captures the unique effect of the speech on changing attitudes towards Likud for different voter groups, which is lost in the additive Model 3a.

Replication Data for this article can be found in Harvard Dataverse at:
https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/KMDXD7

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