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Author(s)	Kohama, Shoko; Inamasu, Kazunori; Tago, Atsushi
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To Denounce, or Not To Denounce: Survey Experiments on Diplomatic Quarrels

SHOKO KOHAMA , KAZUNORI INAMASU , and ATSUSHI TAGO 

Despite widespread concern over heated diplomatic debates and growing interest in public diplomacy, it is still incompletely understood what type of message is more effective for gaining support from foreign public, or the international society, in situations where disputing countries compete in diplomatic campaigns. This study, through multiple survey experiments, uncovers the effect of being silent, issuing positive justification, and negative accusation, in interaction with the opponent's strategy. We demonstrate that negative verbal attacks "work" and undermine the target's popularity as they do in electoral campaigns. Unlike domestic electoral campaigns, however, negative diplomacy has little "backlash" and persuades people to support the attacker. Consequently, mutual verbal fights make neither party more popular than the other. Nevertheless, this does not discourage disputants from waging verbal fights due to the structure similar to the one-shot prisoner's dilemma. We also find that positive messages are highly context-dependent—that is, their effects greatly depend on the opponent's strategy and value proximity between the messenger and the receiver.

Keywords conflict, negative campaign, public diplomacy, survey experiment

Countries involved in disputes often engage in severe “verbal fights.” When Chinese and Japanese military aircraft were scrambled over the East China Sea in 2014, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang condemned Japan, arguing that “the Japanese actions are very dangerous and also very provocative. . . . The Japanese side will bear any and all consequences from this” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2014). On the other side, the Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera made strong accusations against China, stating that “[t]his series of one-sided actions by Chinese military aircraft is extremely dangerous” (Japanese Ministry of Defense, 2014).

The United States has also been involved in similar incidents and verbal campaigns. In January 2016, a U.S. Defense Department spokesperson announced that a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft flying over the Black Sea “was intercepted by a Russian Su-27 in an unsafe and

Shoko Kohama is Associate Professor, Graduate School of Law, Hokkaido University. Kazunori Inamasu is Associate Professor, School of Sociology, Kwansei Gakuin University. Atsushi Tago is Professor, Graduate School of Law, Kobe University.

Address correspondence to Atsushi Tago, Graduate School of Law, Kobe University, 2-1 Rokkodai-cho, Nada, Kobe, Hyogo, 6578501, Japan. E-mail: tago@dragon.kobe-u.ac.jp

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unprofessional manner” (Starr & Lendon, 2016). Following a similar case involving an Iranian drone in the Persian Gulf, a U.S. spokesperson publicly denounced the unmanned aerial vehicle’s (UAV’s) actions as “abnormal and unprofessional” (Starr, 2016).

There is now widespread concern about negative campaigns across borders. The current literature suggests that the well-known “rally ‘round the flag” effect may encourage political leaders to denounce the opposing state in order to “divert” domestic dissatisfaction and to improve their international standing (Baker & Oneal, 2001; Davies, 2002, 2016; Kagotani, Kimura, & Weber, 2014; Miller, 1999; Morgan & Bickers, 1992; Mueller, 1970; Oneal & Bryan, 1995; Powell, 2012; Richard, Morgan, Wilson, Schwebach, & Young, 1993). This may incentivize them to pursue a hawkish stance, which could result in an escalation of the dispute.

Pundits and political observers, on the other hand, contend that the persistent exchange of allegations undermines the international reputation of the disputing countries and causes political apathy. This concern has been studied at the domestic level looking at electoral campaigns: Campaign communications have been found to be increasingly negative over recent years (Geer, 2006; Krupnikov & Piston, 2015). Such negative exchanges have also been shown to undermine public trust in government and hinder political participation (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Patterson, 2002).

These concerns lead to two important questions: Do diplomatic campaigns rally or undermine international support for disputing countries? What is the best strategy for a state to win international society over to its side? Although there is a growing literature on “public diplomacy” (Entman, 2008; Gregory, 2008; Leonard, 2002; Lord, 2006; Manheim 1994; Melissen, 2005; Mor, 2007; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009; Shenhav, Sneafer, & Gabay, 2010; Sheafer, Ben-Nun Bloom, Shenhav, & Segev, 2013; Sheafer, Shehave, Takens, & van Atteveldt, 2014), we still do not know what types of diplomatic statements are the most effective to persuade a foreign public when there are competing countries and messages. This contrasts with the rich literature in political communication on domestic political competition, including negative electoral campaigns (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, & Simon, 1999; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994; Brooks, 2006; Brooks & Geer, 2007; De Nooy & Kleinnijenhuis, 2013; Fridkin & Kenney, 2004; Jasperson & Fan, 2002; Lau, Sigelman, Heldman, & Babbitt, 1999; Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007).

Negative Campaigns in Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy aiming at citizens in third-party states has become increasingly important in recent years as there has been increasing engagement of states in international disputes as allies, coalition partners, mediators, voters in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, or home countries of hostile subnational groups (Gregory, 2008; Leonard, 2002; Lord, 2006). Indeed, studies show that favorable foreign public opinion is essential in shaping supportive foreign governments’ policies (Goldsmith & Horiuchi, 2012; Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, & Holm, 2013; Pevehouse, Tankard, 2001).

In forming their attitudes, diplomatic campaigns, often through media, play a vital role (Baum, 2003; Gilboa, 2000; Manheim & Albritton, 1983; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009; Weaver, Graber, McCombs, & Eyal, 1981) because ordinary citizens usually do not have extensive knowledge or interest in foreign affairs; this is even more pronounced when it comes to affairs between other countries (Almond, 1960; Converse, 1964; Lippmann, 1955). This is why disputing countries such as China and its neighbors passionately make their case in English in addition to their official languages.

Among various forms of diplomatic campaigns, we elaborate on official verbal communication in the context of low-salience, early-stage disputes between states, whereas some studies focus on “naming and shaming” campaigns by nongovernmental actors (DeMeritt, 2012; Hafner-Burton, 2008). We also narrow our focus on early-stage disputes because they might involve distinct dynamics from normal or war times, considering that Goldsmith and Horiuchi (2009) demonstrate that the effect of U.S. high-level visits varied before and after the second Iraq War. Besides, early-stage disputes might provide situations where public opinion and media could influence the course of governmental actions to a great extent (Baum & Potter, 2008; Weaver et al., 1981). Our research agenda also differs from the influential argument of “audience costs,” which shows that public announcements by democratic leaders convey credible threats (e.g., Fearon, 1994). While these studies investigate threats of future actions and the institutional characteristics behind them, we predominantly focus on the consequence of *verbal* behavior and its *tones*.

Specifically, *we elucidate interaction between disputants’ strategies, expecting that the effect of diplomatic statements depends on competing messages issued by a rival state.* Existing literature demonstrates that policy consistency, cultural and political proximity, and the credibility of countries lead to successful public diplomacy (Goldsmith & Horiuchi, 2009; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009; Sheafer et al., 2014; Shenhav et al., 2010). Although these studies shed light on substantial characteristics of public diplomacy, it is not obvious what type of communication is more effective in situations where the opposing party also conducts diplomatic campaigns. Therefore, this study further develops important works highlighting competition in public diplomacy (Mor, 2007; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009) and explicitly examining interaction in domestic political campaigns (Carraro et al., 2012; Craig, Rippere, & Grayson, 2014; Garramone, 1985). This perspective is particularly important in studies of diplomatic quarrels because scholars emphasize strategic interaction in international relations.

Moreover, this study compares how three different types of strategies—silence, positive self-justification, and negative accusation against the opponent—influence the foreign public, rather than examining the effect of a certain type of communication.¹ Therefore, we hypothesize that *diplomatic messages with a negative tone mobilize more opposition toward the targeted state than positive self-justification messages.* This draws on the rich literature on electoral campaigns showing (although with some notable reservations) that negative advertisements decrease the popularity of the target and, more generally, negative information has greater effects on people’s attitudes (Fridkin & Kenney, 2004; Jasperson & Fan, 2002; Lau & Pomper, 2004; Meernik, Aloisi, Sowell, & Nichols, 2012; Soroka, 2014).

Another hypothesis is that *governments in diplomatic quarrels suffer little “backlash” when they wage negative campaigns.* Scholars show that negative advertisements often exhibit backlash against the candidate endorsed by campaign advertisements, which weakens their net effect (Garramone, 1984; Jasperson & Fan, 2002; Lau et al., 2007). Others also claim that sponsor characteristics, particularly the perceived credibility of the source, affect the persuasiveness of campaigns and the size of backlash (Garramone, 1985; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Shen & Wu, 2002; Weber, Dunaway, & Johnson, 2012) and that uncivil messages are often perceived as less likable and less informative (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Fridkin & Kenney, 2008, 2011).

Accordingly, diplomatic messages will be less likely to backfire because governments have a significant informational advantage over “disinterested and ignorant” citizens in the field of foreign affairs (Almond, 1960; Converse, 1964; Lippmann, 1955) and informational asymmetries are one of the main sources of credibility (Druckman, 2001; Zaller, 1992). Regarding civility,

diplomatic language is typically characterized by restrained and moderate vocabulary, which enables diplomats to communicate without becoming provocative (Nick, 2001; Nicolson, 1960).

We conduct multiple survey experiments to examine these hypotheses. The experimental approach enables rigorous examination of the effect while observational and aggregated data often utilized in existing studies obscure whether governmental actions cause public opinion, or vice versa. Moreover, it enables us to highlight the effects of *verbal* stimuli, whereas existing literature does not necessarily claim that verbal provocation per se has distinct effects from nonverbal threats or benefits yielding such provocation. Moreover, our experiment is structured so as to highlight the interaction of strategies, rather than employing static and one-sided scenarios.

In the following experiments, we focus on the tone of announcements and hold other message traits constant, although current studies show that the following characteristics of messages matter: relevance to policies as opposed to candidates' personality (Fridkin & Kenney, 2008, 2011); the sponsor of the advertisement including candidates, parties, and independent groups (Brooks & Murov, 2012; Dowling & Wichowsky, 2015; Pfau, Holbert, Szabo, & Kaminski, 2002; Weber et al., 2012); the characteristics of receivers such as partisanship and tolerance to uncivil messages (Pfau et al., 2002; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011); and demographic factors of candidates (Fridkin, Kenney, Woodall, 2009; Hitchon, Chang, & Harris, 1997; Krupnikov & Piston, 2015).

Experiment 1

We conducted an Internet-based, between-subjects survey experiment in November 2014, through Nikkei Research Inc.² A total of 2,059 people residing in Japan participated in the experiment via the Internet.³ Our sample involved a wide range of population in terms of age, gender, income level, educational background and ideology and our randomized experiment did not aim to acquire a representative sample.⁴ However, we did run a series of supplementary analyses to verify the internal and external validity of our study, a part of which is reported later.

Our experiment is designed as follows. Upon answering several practice questions, all participants are presented with the following scenario, in which the scrambling of fighter jets occurs between two anonymous countries:⁵

Country A and Country B maintain conflicting territorial claims over land and sea. They also contest over airspace, leading to an increasing number of cases where fighter jets of the countries fly simultaneously in the disputed airspace. As a result, a "near-miss" incident recently occurred where their fighter jets approached very close to each other.

Following the incident, the government of each country publicized the following announcements....

The scenario mimics actual incidents which occurred a few times between China and Japan in 2014. The first incident was reported on May 24 and was followed by verbal fights between the Chinese and the Japanese governments. Similar incidents occurred on June 11 and reportedly in early August. Because scrambling is not a rare event, we believe that the scenario is sufficiently realistic yet generalizable.

Participants are then randomly assigned a message from each side of the disputing countries, which adopts one of the following tones: *denouncing* the other side, *self-promoting* itself, or remaining *silent*.⁶ The *denouncing* message is such that the opposing

Table 1
List of treatments

Country A/Country B	(a) Remains silent	(b) Self-promotes	(c) Denounces
(a) Remains silent	Group 1		
(b) Self-promotes	Group 2	Group 3	
(c) Denounces	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6

Note. The exact sentence for each announcement is the following: (a) “We have no comment.” (b) “Our activity is a part of regular warning and surveillance, which is legitimate.” (c) “A(B)’s action is extremely dangerous and abnormal, which can lead to a serious incident.”

party’s action is “extremely dangerous and abnormal, which can lead to a serious incident.” The *self-promoting* comment states that “our activity is a part of regular warning and surveillance, which is legitimate.” The *no-comment* announcement simply states, “we have no comment.” Considering that diplomacy is characterized by two-sided actions, we constructed six unique pairs of messages, such as “self-promotion versus denouncement,” as treatments. All combinations are listed in Table 1.

We analyzed actual statements that the Chinese and the Japanese governments publicized following the fighter-jet scrambling incidents to ensure that our stimuli do not deviate from regular diplomatic protocols. In consultation with a diplomat, we highlighted the essential words and phrases for *denouncement* and *self-promotion*. Typical *denouncing* messages emphasize the bad behavior by the counterpart and warn it of the undesirable consequences of its behavior. Such statements often include words such as “dangerous,” “abnormal,” and “unusual” as well as phrases such as “trigger unexpected incidents” and “could lead to an unexpected accident.” Conversely, *self-promoting* announcements emphasize the routineness, regularity, and legality of the state’s own actions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2014; Japanese Ministry of Defense, 2014).

After being randomly exposed to one of the stimuli, each participant reports their support level for each country, choosing from “support,” “somewhat support,” “somewhat oppose,” “oppose,” and “don’t know.”⁷ Each answer is indexed from 1 to 4, where higher values mean higher support. Finally, subjects answer some post-experimental questions regarding their personal background including age, gender, income, education, and ideology.

We refrain from naming the actual pair of countries (China and Japan) in the scenario. Therefore, the subjects’ responses are primarily interpreted as capturing their attitudes toward foreign states. It is anticipated that the subjects will react differently if they are provided with other information on the disputants, such as their name, military power, and economic scale. Thus, the anonymous scenario allows us to highlight the effects of *verbal* actions independent of nonverbal threats that a specific country may inevitably provoke among Japanese participants. Yet it is possible that some respondents can identify the original context of the scenario and their responses are biased accordingly. This issue will be addressed in the supplementary analysis and in Experiment 2.

Our randomization process appears to be successful. Participants in each group are well-balanced and no significant intergroup difference is observed in terms of respondents’ age, gender, residential location, educational background, income level, and ideology. Detailed sample demography is reported in the Supplemental Appendix.

Result 1: Public Support for the Attacker

The most striking finding of our experiment is the large positive effect of verbal attacks on the attacker’s popularity. In fact, the results indicate little evidence of a backlash effect by diplomatic negative campaigns; rather, the *denouncing* message significantly increases the attacker’s popularity unless the opponent also attacks.⁸

We present our results with the notations of “the attacker” and “the attacked,” instead of Country A and B, for convenience.⁹ The notations are just for labeling purposes and do not necessarily imply that “the attacker” adopts a negative strategy in a substantive way.

The left panel of Figure 1 shows how the statement by the attacker affects its own popularity, holding the strategy of the attacked constant. The bars indicate the mean popularity level and the lines show the 95% confidence interval. Therefore, the bars in the left part indicate the public support for the attacker when the other side (the attacked) remains *silent*. Each bar in the left part corresponds to the attacker’s three strategies—*silence*, *self-promotion*, and *denouncement*, respectively. Hence, the comparison between *silence* and *denouncement* indicates the average treatment effect of a negative attack on the attacker’s favorability, given that the attacked remains *silent*. The following analyses discuss the average treatment effect of each message, holding the counterpart’s strategy constant. This enables us to explore the extent to which the effect of negative and positive messages depends on the opponent’s strategy.

The results demonstrate that adversaries can acquire public support by accusing the opponent and that *silence* is not golden in the realm of diplomatic quarrels. *Denouncement* yields the highest public support for the attacker regardless of the opponent’s strategy, whereas *silence* is always the least effective means of raising popularity.

When the opponent remains *silent*, for example, the mean popularity of the attacker is 1.56, which indicates that people are somewhat opposing it. Mean popularity increases to 2.57 (i.e., by one level of support) with *self-promotion*. When the attacker verbally denounces the silent opponent, the mean popularity achieves an even higher score of 3.05, which is equivalent to “somewhat support.” The difference among the three strategies is statistically significant at the 5% significance level ($p = 0.00$).

Put differently, given that the counterpart remains *silent*, only 12% of the respondents support (including somewhat support) the attacker who also remains *silent*. Yet the attacker attracts support from 62% of respondents with *self-promotion* and 76% with

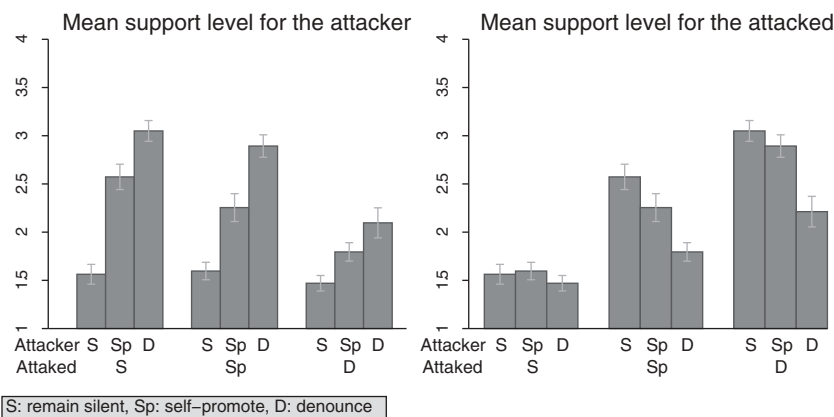


Figure 1. Popular support for the attacker and the attacked. *Note.* Whiskers indicate 95% CI.

denouncement. Thus, accusing the silent counterpart is an extremely effective way of raising the attacker's own popularity.

Similar dynamics arise when the attacker faces an opponent who *self-promotes*. The attacker's mean popularity increases from 1.60 to 2.11 by switching from *silence* to *self-promotion* ($p = 0.00$). Likewise, when the attacker adopts the *denouncement* strategy, its mean popularity reaches 2.89, which is significantly higher than that with the *self-promotion* strategy ($p = 0.00$). The gain is as large as a 27% increase in full or partial support.

However, the utility of *denouncement* substantially deteriorates if both sides rely on it. The mean popularity of the attacker gained with *silence*, *self-promotion*, and *denouncement* is 1.47, 1.80, and 2.10, respectively, in this case. The overall low favorability indicates the negative impact of accusation by the attacked, which will be discussed in the next section. In addition to the overall modest favorability, the benefit of *denouncement* compared with the other strategies also diminishes. Although *denouncement* still promises the highest support and the difference is significant ($p = 0.00$), the size of the effects is not as high as in other cases.¹⁰ The substantive advantage is also limited because respondents are on average still leaning toward opposition. Mutual verbal fights, therefore, do not help disputants promote their positive image.

Denouncement has only a limited effect when countered by *denouncement* because of its double-edged effect. When used against *silence* or *self-promotion*, verbal attacks monotonically enhance public support for the attacker. More respondents become positive and fewer respondents regard the attacker in a negative light. In contrast, when both parties verbally accuse each other, it increases both support and opposition. Verbal attacks, compared with the *self-promoting* message, increase support (including somewhat support) by nearly 15%, whereas they also provoke opposition by 14%. As a result, the aggregated impact of *denouncement* does not greatly exceed that of *self-promotion* in the face of the opponent's *denouncement*.

Result 2: Effects on the Public Support for the Attacked

Our experiment also demonstrates that the *denouncing* message significantly undermines the popularity of the attacked unless the attacked side remains silent. The right panel of [Figure 1](#) graphically presents the effect of the attacker's statements on the attacked, holding the attacked statement constant.

Public support for the attacked side considerably decreases when exposed to verbal accusation. Given that it adopts the *denouncement* strategy, the mean popularity decreases from 3.05 to 2.89 to 2.21 as the attacker's strategy shifts from *silence*, to *self-promotion*, and to *denouncement*. That is, respondents "somewhat oppose" the attacked side when it is the subject of verbal accusation, whereas they "somewhat support" the attacked side when its opponent remains silent. The difference in the effect of three messages is statistically significant ($p = 0.00$). The damage is substantively large, which is equivalent to a 38% reduction in full or partial support for the attacked. Likewise, when the attacked *self-promotes*, the favorability declines from 2.11 to 1.80 when the attacker switches from *self-promotion* to *denouncement* ($p = 0.00$).

Interestingly, however, accusation causes no significant reduction of the popularity of the attacked side which remains *silent*. The mean support for it when the attacker announces *no comment*, *self-promotion*, and *denouncement* is 1.60, 1.60, and 1.47, respectively. The difference is not statistically significant ($p = 0.07$).¹¹

Taken together, negative campaigns are an effective means of obtaining public support and dissuading people from supporting the party which engages in any kind of verbal exchange. On the other hand, accusing the party which remains *silent* is hardly persuasive. We also find that verbal fights make neither party more popular than the other because the gain from attacking the counterpart and the loss of being attacked eventually cancel each other out (the difference between the right-most bar of each panel in Figure 1 is negligible).

Our findings underscore the mechanism by which diplomatic verbal fights escalate. Governments engage in verbal fights not because they are the best way of provoking public support. As we have already discussed, mutual verbal attacks hardly help disputants sell their positive image. Moreover, they do not suffer negative attacks when they maintain a strategy of *silence*.

Why do disputants ever commit verbal fights? Unfortunately, the results indicate that they cannot opt out of verbal fights even if they want to because they are entrapped in a situation similar to the (one-shot) prisoner's dilemma. The prisoner's dilemma is a well-known game where actors are unable to cooperate to achieve the "social optimum" because the structure of the game posits that actors earn the best payoff when one side defects while the other cooperates. The structure strongly incentivizes them to defect and hinders cooperation *even if they know that mutual cooperation will make both of them better off*.

The structure of verbal fights is parallel to the game in the sense that a disputant achieves the highest popularity when the attacker *denounces* while the opponent maintains *silence*.¹² It is extremely difficult for competing governments to agree not to accuse each other because both of them know that *silence* will be capitalized upon. Thus, they are compelled to accuse the opponent even though they know that mutual verbal attacks may not eventually benefit them.

A Closer Look into the Process

A closer examination indicates that the key to respondents' attitude formation is the divergence of messages. Comparing the proportion of respondents who answer "I don't know" when asked to what extent she or he supports Country A or B, it is as high as 40% among those who receive identical messages from both sides (Groups 3, 6) while it decreases to 18% among those exposed to divergent pairs (Groups 2, 4, 5). Surprisingly, identical messages are less helpful in consolidating attitudes than *silence versus silence* (32%), which seemingly conveys no information to the public.¹³ Considering that "don't know" responses in our experiment are primarily induced by uncertainty and ambivalence (Beatty & Herrmann, 1995; Gilljam & Granberg, 1993; Krosnick et al., 2002), the results suggest that the persistent exchange of mutual accusations could hinder people from forming supporting attitudes and eventually undermine the efficacy of public diplomacy.¹⁴

We also find that the respondents perceive different levels of *legitimacy*, sense of *secrecy*, and possibility of *further escalation* when diverse messages are delivered.¹⁵ First, unilateral *denouncement* creates an impression that the attacker is acting legitimately for self-defense. The perceived legitimacy of the attacker is significantly higher than that of the attacked who *self-promotes* (by 0.66) and who maintains *silence* (by 1.01) on a 4-point scale. Conversely, *silence* in the face of *self-promotion* and *denouncement* leaves a negative impression that the government is hiding something (the difference between the parties is 0.50 and 0.98, respectively).

On the other hand, the perception of *self-promotion* is more multifarious and highly depends on the opponent's strategy. When countered by *silence* or *denouncement*, it is perceived as an indication that the party is more willing to escalate the dispute than the other side (the mean difference is 0.45 and 0.75, respectively). Interestingly, when the opponent remains silent, the *self-promoting* party is considered to be taking more legitimate actions than the opponent (the mean difference is 0.47). However, when the opponent commits verbal attacks, the *self-promoting* state is perceived as less honest than the attacker (the mean difference is 0.56). Thus, people's interpretation of *self-promotion* is greatly affected by the nature of competing messages, whereas *silence* is generally perceived as an indication of concealment and *denouncement* principally creates an impression of legitimacy.

Supplementary Analysis

We conducted a series of robustness checks.¹⁶ We first address the possible bias caused by sampling from a voluntarily preregistered pool. To that end, we reexamine the outcome through regression analyses with and without modifying the bias, employing the entropy balancing technique that reweights the sample to known features of the target population (Haimnueller & Xu, 2013). Our main findings remain unchanged: *Denouncement* attracts more support for the attacker than *self-promotion* and *silence*; *denouncement* undermines support for the attacked; consequently, *mutual denouncement* does not significantly increase support for either party; *silence* protects countries from verbal attacks.

We also give serious consideration to the possibility that some respondents are aware of the original context of our experimental scenario (i.e., the scrambling cases between China and Japan). In fact, half of the participants were able to correctly answer in the post-experimental questionnaire that the anonymous scenario was actually mimicking the incidents between China and Japan. It is therefore a concern that such respondents are more knowledgeable and hence, more sensitive to the tone of the campaigns than others. Another problem arises if they respond by consciously or unconsciously assuming that either Country A or B is Japan and not a "foreign" country.

However, the supplementary analysis shows little difference between those who could identify the context and those who didn't. Highlighting dissimilarity in the nearly identical results of two groups of respondents, we find two observable features among those who failed to recognize the context: Messages generally have modest impacts; *denouncement* is not significantly more effective than *self-promotion* in the face of the opponent's attacks. This may be because people lacking political knowledge do not perceive the different connotations behind *self-promotion* and *denouncement*.

Experiment 2

We then conducted follow-up experiments in the United States and South Korea from June 17 to 25, 2015. In Experiment 2 presented here, we use the same scenario with the same stimuli, but this time presenting the actual names of the countries (i.e., China and Japan). Nine treatments (including *silence versus silence* as a control group) are generated accordingly and are randomly assigned to approximately 2,000 respondents in each country.

The primary purpose of the experiments is to examine the effect of governmental announcements among people genuinely residing in third-party states. Although we confirmed in the previous section that our main findings remain unchanged even if we take

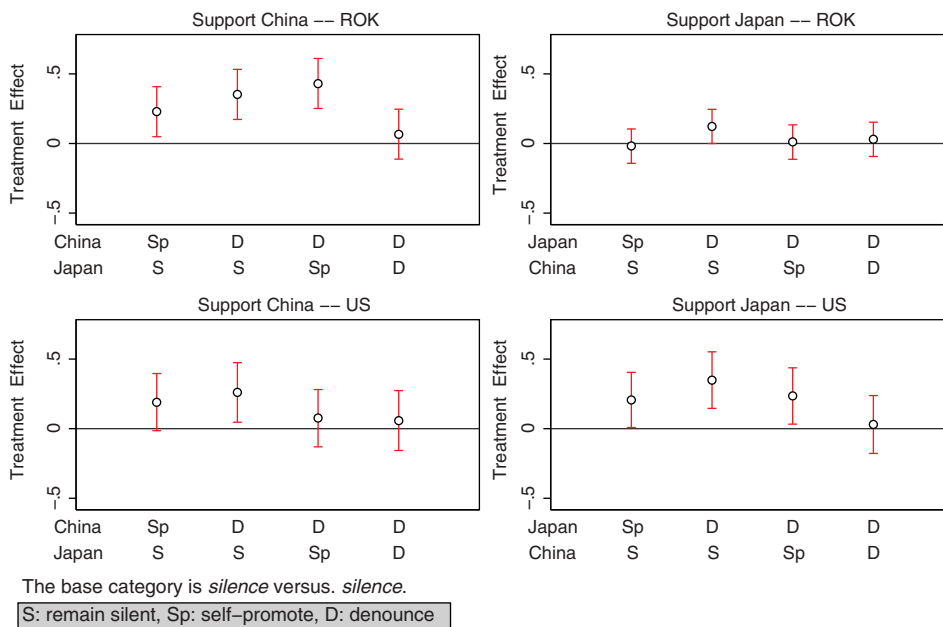


Figure 2. OLS: The effect of key treatments in the United States (US) and Republic of Korea (ROK). *Note.* Whiskers indicate 95% CI.

into account respondents' awareness of the original context, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that it biases their responses.

We analyze the outcome of Experiment 2 with ordinary least squares (OLS) as we did in the supplementary analysis and graphically report the results in Figure 2¹⁷ To examine our main hypotheses, the figure highlights the effect of key treatments on the respondents' attitudes toward China or Japan with a 95% confidence interval.¹⁸ A positive value indicates increasing favorability toward China (or Japan) from the baseline support under *silence* versus *silence*.

First and foremost, *denouncement* significantly increases support for the attacker, especially when it is used against the *silent* opponent. The two coefficients from the left side of each panel show how much popularity the attacker can gain by employing *self-promotion* or *denouncement* against the *silent* target. Because the base category is *silence* versus *silence* and the opponent's strategy is *silence* across these cases, the two coefficients demonstrate simply the effect of the attacker's strategy. In all four panels—that is, both in the United States and in South Korea—we confirm that *denouncing* the *silent* target significantly increases the attacker's popularity. This finding is quite robust across Experiments 1 and 2.

Another important finding is that verbal attacks effectively undermine public support for the target, which is also consistent with Experiment 1. A close examination of the upper-left panel demonstrates that China's popularity is significantly low when Japan *denounces* it. The decline in its favorability when Japan switches from *silence* to *denouncement* is statistically significant ($p = 0.00$) and is also significant when Japan shifts from *self-promotion* to *denouncement* ($p = 0.00$). The same pattern exists in the lower-right panel, where Americans express significantly lower support toward Japan

when China *denounces* Japan than when China remains *silent* ($p = 0.00$) or *self-promotes* ($p = 0.05$). When it comes to attitudes toward China among Americans, the implication of Japan's switching from *silence* to *denouncement* roughly follows the same line, although it is not significant at the 5% level ($p = 0.07$). Consequently, mutual *denouncement* helps neither party sell its positive image while one-sided verbal attacks attract support, which is common across all four panels. We also confirm that any of the attacker's strategies significantly affect the target's popularity when it remains *silent*.¹⁹

While confirming the main findings of Experiment 1, Experiment 2 yields more nuanced results, suggesting that contextual characteristics behind diplomatic statements may matter. Specifically, the effect of *self-promotion*, or positive messaging, is context-dependent. Comparing two panels in each column, we notice that *self-promotion* generates the key differences. Remember that Experiment 1 suggests that *self-promotion* creates a positive impression when paired with *silence* and a negative impression when countered by *denouncement*. According to Experiment 2, the effect of *self-promotion* depends not only on the other side's strategy but also on who issues it and who receives it.

China's *self-promotion* works for it in South Korea, whereas Japan's *self-promotion* benefits it only in the United States. China's *self-promotion* against Japan's *silence* has a positive effect on China's support only in South Korea (the upper-left panel). Conversely, Japan's *self-promotion* against China's *silence* is perceived positively only in the United States (the lower-right panel). Against the counterpart's *denouncement*, China's *self-promotion* prevents Japan from gaining popularity with verbal attacks only in South Korea (the upper-right panel) and Japan's *self-promotion* cancels out China's accusation only in the United States (the lower-left panel). Interestingly, *self-promotion* by both sides has no significant effect on both sides.

We consider that this may be explained by the political and value proximity between the messenger and the receiver as current studies consider this to be an essential component of successful public diplomacy (Entman, 2008; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009; Sheafer et al., 2013; Sheafer et al., 2014). That is, American citizens feel much closer to Japan which has been a democratic ally, while Koreans feel closer to China because of their long-term cultural connection with China and heated antagonism toward Japan on historical and territorial issues. When we examine the baseline favorability of the two countries, China is more popular than Japan in South Korea ("somewhat oppose" to China and leaning to "oppose" toward Japan) and the opposite is true in the United States ("somewhat oppose" to China and nearly "somewhat support" for Japan). Thus, the results suggest that *self-promotion* by a state with closer political and value proximity (i.e., Japan for Americans and China for Koreans) could be as persuasive as *denouncement*. We must add a final note on the magnitude of treatment effects that negative attitudes toward Japan among Korean people are quite robust against externally given stimuli.

Discussion and Conclusion

Negative campaigns in domestic and international politics share unfortunate common traits: Negative campaigns more or less "work." Specifically, negative diplomacy significantly increases foreign public support for the attacking country and decreases the favorability of the attacked.

However, this study also demonstrates that the effect of verbal diplomatic campaigns considerably depends on the strategy of the opposing side. This finding calls for more serious attention to the interaction between strategies of the attacker and the attacked, whereas many

studies conduct experiments with a one-sided campaign scenario (with the important exceptions of Carraro and colleagues [2012], Craig and colleagues [2014], and Garramone [1985]).

Specifically, when a government is under attack (as well as in other situations), it can restore its popularity by also attacking the attacker, which contrasts with Carraro and colleagues (2012) and Craig and colleagues (2014) finding some evidence for backlash. This highlights a striking difference between domestic and diplomatic communications: Governments suffer little backlash in diplomatic fights, in contrast with candidates in domestic elections (Garramone, 1984; Jaspersen & Fan, 2002; Lau et al., 2007). If this is due to the credibility and civility of diplomatic communication as we argue, campaigns by nongovernmental organizations and terrorist groups may involve different dynamics.

Our analysis also suggests that adversaries can hardly opt out of verbal fights because of the structure similar to the prisoner's dilemma. This genuinely creates a "dilemma" because we also find that mutual verbal fights make neither party more popular than the other and silence nullifies the negative effect of being attacked. This is a novel contribution of this study to the communication literature that predominantly explores the consequences of negative campaigns and pays little attention to their causes. Political observers tend to simply assert that candidates adopt negative campaigns because they "work." Yet the story may be more complicated. Even if adversaries know that verbal fights backfire, they are unable to maintain silence because they can take advantage of the silent opponent and both of them know that. If this is what is happening, proving the ineffectiveness of negative messages may not be sufficient to make electoral and diplomatic campaigns less negative.

Our study also shows that positive messages are highly context-dependent, compared to silence or negative messaging. How people perceive positive diplomatic messages is largely affected by the opponent's strategy: People perceive it positively when the opposing party gives no comment, while they interpret it in a negative light when the other side verbally attacks. Moreover, positive messaging achieves desirable consequences for the messenger only when there exists favorable foreign public opinion to begin with.

This study is not without limitation. The most serious challenge arises from the inability of reproducing a diplomatic campaign during an international dispute in an experimental environment. People in reality may not necessarily be exposed to diplomatic announcements as they are in our experiments. Actual announcements are usually much longer than a sentence and more dynamic than simultaneously presented sentences. Moreover, we do not claim that our experimental scenario is a general representation of early-stage international disputes.

Yet, these problems do not completely hinder the generalizability of this study, considering that people usually read the excerpt of diplomatic statements that is highlighted by media, instead of reading entire statements. This is all the more so in our study because people predominantly rely on media in collecting information on low-salience disputes between other countries (Baum & Potter, 2008). This is why public diplomacy sometimes aims at foreign media (Gilboa, 2000; Manheim & Albritton, 1983; Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009; Sheaffer & Shenhav, 2009). Given this, diplomatic announcements, in practice, can have greater or weaker effects on public attitudes than demonstrated in our study, depending on how media treat them. It will serve as a fruitful avenue for future research to examine whether verbal attacks work in the same manner when mediated by agencies.

Although aircraft scrambling is quite common in today's world, it is certainly not the only scenario characterizing the early stage of international conflict. Aircraft scrambling and similar actions of "showing force" constitute 46% of early-stage disputes after World War II (Palmer, d'Orazio, Kenwick, & Lane, 2015).²⁰ Indeed, the Japanese government

conducted 943 scramblings in FY2014 (The Associated Press, 2015) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member aircraft also conducted more than 500 scramblings in 2014 (Nardelli & Arnett, 2015). Yet international disputes do not always involve territorial issues nor countries possessing a substantial air force. Therefore, our scenario is certainly not an exhaustive representation of international disputes, even if it highlights an important aspect of them. As such, we must leave it to future study to explore how people respond to diplomatic quarrels over non-security issues and other types of provocative incidents.

The implications of this particular study for dynamically repeated campaigns are limited. Our findings suggest that the marginal effect of *denouncement* decreases when iterated due to the decline of information credibility. Moreover, the infinitely iterated prisoner's dilemma is known to allow cooperation and hence can be perceived differently by the public. Adding more dynamics to the scenario, we believe, will be a promising avenue for the future research.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed on the publisher's website at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2016.1200700>

Notes

1. A content analysis that we have conducted on official governmental announcements and international media coverage over Sino-Japanese fighter jet scramblings in 2014 shows that the governments actually adopted two distinct tones in announcements: either denouncing the other side for its dangerous behavior or justifying itself in terms of legitimacy and legality (Kohama, Inamasu, & Tago, n.d.).
2. <http://www.nikkei-r.co.jp/english/>
3. Although we exploit the full sample in the following analysis, we also conducted a robustness check with a subsample excluding possible "inattentive" or "satisficing" respondents identified by two "screeners" (Berinsky, Margolis, & Sances, 2014; Krosnick, 1991). See the Supplemental Appendix for details.
4. Eighty-three percent of the Japanese population has access to the Internet as of 2013 and the Internet penetration rate exceeds 90% among the population between the ages of 13 and 59 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan, 2014, p. 57). For details of our sample, see the Supplemental Appendix.

5. We clearly stated that they are imaginary states and then specifically instructed participants not to have any specific countries in mind throughout the experiment.
6. As we mentioned earlier, we conducted a content analysis of governmental announcements and media coverage on the Sino-Japanese scrambling cases and confirmed that governments as well as international media by and large adopted these three strategies (Kohama et al., n.d.).
7. Answers of participants who give “don’t know” are treated as missing in the most part of the following analyses.
8. Considering the large sample size, our analysis is unlikely to commit the Type 2 error. Even if we estimate a small effect size ($f = .15$), Type 2 error probability is less than .02.
9. We can assume that the labels of “Country A” and “Country B” have little impact on participants’ responses and that support levels for Country A and Country B are comparable.
10. The effect of *denouncement* in comparison with *self-promotion* becomes insignificant, if we narrow our sample to participants who failed to identify the original context of the scenario. We elaborate on this issue later.
11. Although the difference between *self-promotion* and *denouncement* is statistically significant when we use the full sample ($p = 0.04$), it is not robust across subsamples and is substantively negligible.
12. We refrain from presenting the precise payoff structure of the game because specification of payoffs prerequisite comprehensive understanding of what states pursue in the early stage of international conflict. However, scholars have yet to even validate if states seek to maximize their absolute level of support or to become relatively more popular than their opponent. Our study thus must be considered a step forward toward a better understanding of diplomatic fights rather than a complete illustration of the game.
13. For detail, see Figure 1 in the Supplemental Appendix.
14. See the Supplemental Appendix for more discussion.
15. Hereafter, the mean differences are statistically significant at .01 level unless otherwise noted
16. See the Supplemental Appendix for the detailed discussion.
17. See the Supplemental Appendix for the results of the ordered logit analysis and the regression table.
18. As we select four treatments for each country including *denouncement versus denouncement* for both, we report the main effect of seven treatments in the figure. The only treatment omitted from it is *self-promotion versus self-promotion*, which does not considerably hinder our analysis. Although we omitted some cases from each plot for the sake of space, some of them are reported in the following text. For more comprehensive results, see the regression table in the Supplemental Appendix.
19. These cases are presented only in the Supplemental Appendix.
20. See the Supplemental Appendix for details.

ORCID

Shoko Kohama  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5174-7313>

Kazunori Inamasu  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6618-6536>

Atsushi Tago  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9932-3728>

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