Framing, Public Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism in Central Asia

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/renan/15/
ABSTRACT

Increasingly, the US State Department is relying on efforts of public diplomacy to improve America’s image abroad. We test the theoretical efficacy of these efforts through an experiment. Participants were recruited in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. All but those participants randomly assigned to a control group read a quote about the US. We varied attribution of this quote to President Bush, an Ambassador, an ordinary American or to no one. We then asked respondents a battery of questions about their opinions of the US before and after a long discussion with other participants about the US. We find that the identity of the messenger matters, as those who read the quote attributed to Bush tended to have lower opinions of the US. After the discussion, these views partially dissipated. Post-discussion views were more heavily influenced by how other participants viewed the US. After controlling for the source and location of the discussion, when the discussion took place among people with more positive initial views of the US, views of the US improved. However, when there was a large range of views in the discussion, post-discussion views of the US were relatively worse. Based on this study, we suggest new directions for the conduct of public diplomacy.
INTRODUCTION

The United States suffers from an “image problem.” Prominent state department reports (e.g., United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy 2008), though, assume that this reputation can be reshaped through public diplomacy if the Department of State recruited diplomats with the communication skills necessary to influence foreign publics.

Can public diplomacy work? That is, can communicative efforts—absent substantive changes in US policy—increase the likelihood that US policy can meet its objectives? Scholars and practitioners are divided over the efficacy of public diplomacy. Their analyses typically start from one of three assumptions. First, materialist-realpolitik approaches typically contend that the United States need not be concerned with its images abroad; no particular expenditure of resources or time is needed or justified. Realpolitik should govern US foreign policy, and, while some degree of image making might enhance the US’s ability to pursue its material self-interest, an overriding concern with the perceptions of those abroad would erode the US’s capacity to achieve its goals.

Second, materialist-globalist approaches advocate major changes to US foreign policy—toward greater internationalism, less power-laden diplomacy, more commitment to international normative structures, and so on. Those arguing from these perspectives tend likewise to be unconcerned with the US’s image problem. To them, to change the image of the US requires a change to US policies. It is in this sense materialist, rather than ideational.

A third perspective, which might be broadly labeled ideational-voluntarist, deems the image problem worthy of attention and potentially amenable to change. It is ideational in the sense that it takes ideas, images, and subjective perspectives seriously—not as epiphenomena of underlying material conditions, but as causally important in their own right. It is voluntarist, since it envisions that a potentially significant margin exists to affect the impact that ideas have. It does not deny the existence of materiality (e.g., concrete US foreign policies on trade, the environment, democracy promotion, and anti-terrorism), but argues that material conditions are made meaningful through the ideas that shape human existence. It does not deny that structures constrain the voluntary action of individuals who seek to influence the impact of ideas, but argues that we should not underestimate the room for agency within seemingly iron-clad structural

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2 A fourth perspective that focuses on the role that ideas and culture play but views change as occurring slowly over time might be labeled ideational-structural. Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” argument is one example of such a perspective. Thanks to Jorge Domínguez for this suggestion.
constraints. To say that ideas matter and that there is room for agency is not to say that they determine everything. Indeed, this article suggests important limits to both, while arguing that the scope for how they matter is nonetheless worthy of more scholarly attention.

Those who discuss “public diplomacy” are guided by such ideational-voluntarist assumptions. They contend that the image problem the United States faces is, in part, a problem of communication. No advocate of public diplomacy would pretend that hardened enemies could be swayed by such communicative efforts, but they would claim that “marketing” US-friendly ideas in the “marketplace of ideas” is essential to maximizing the potential of global publics to be pro-American.

The shortcoming of such ideational-voluntarist approaches is that they tend to assume rather than demonstrate the casual impact of ideas. This article tests efforts to sway opinion in two ex-Soviet Central Asian (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) countries through an experiment conducted through a survey and focus groups. In this study, we explore the effects that framing, the selective presentation of a set of ideas or views about an issue, has on popular attitudes about the United States. We contend that this framing experiment approximates the logic of public diplomacy while giving us analytic traction on a problem that is otherwise difficult to study.

Theories of Framing and Persuasion

Asking what, if anything, can be done to improve the US’s image abroad raises questions about how people generate political opinions and how other people and future events can change those opinions. Even for individuals who are not politically engaged, the normal social interactions of daily life provide a variety of potential sources of political information that establish the foundations for the beliefs underlying opinions. In the absence of direct personal experience with a particular policy (such as US “imperialism” or foreign intervention), these sources include mass-media communication (including entertainment such as American movies and television shows), speeches by educators, religious or community leaders, and informal conversations with friends, families and co-workers. These encounters may make certain pieces of information more pertinent (priming), help people organize or interpret the information into a particular perspective (framing), or thoroughly revise one’s beliefs about the policy (persuasion).

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3 Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were left out of the analysis because conducting focus groups or distributing questionnaires about the United States in these two, hard authoritarian contexts was not possible.
Our focus is on framing, how the attribution of frames affects how they are received, and whether their effects persist after deliberation with peers. Message frames affect political opinions by selectively emphasizing a set of considerations about an issue, providing alternative definitions, constructions or depictions of a policy problem. Framing effects occur when people who receive these frames emphasize the same considerations when constructing their opinions (Jacoby 2000; Nelson and Oxley 1999). Exposure to different frames causes people with similar belief structures to come to different conclusions about an issue (Gamson 1992; Zaller and Feldman 1992). This may be especially true for ambivalent people who hold conflicting beliefs about an object, since different frames influence which of these beliefs plays the largest role in the construction (or articulation) of the opinion. Beliefs themselves do not change; only their order of importance to the decision-maker or relevance to the formation of the opinion changes.  

Following Chiozza (2007), we assume that people possess both positive and negative images of the US. Which of these beliefs and images are most salient could determine whether or not they view the United States favorably or unfavorably at any given moment. For example, consider how an individual would form an opinion of the US’s global role. At the outset, s/he may believe that the United States does “good things,” such as distributing foreign aid, leading disaster relief missions, and making available vast capital markets to foreign companies. S/he may simultaneously believe that the US does “bad things,” such as overwhelming local contexts with its pervasive cultural products, producing enormous amounts of greenhouse gases, engaging in unpopular wars and being concerned only with its own narrowly-defined self-interest. Imagine that s/he encountered a frame that emphasized the US’s meager per capita spending on foreign aid. Such a frame would increase the salience of his/her existing beliefs in U.S. selfishness; increasing the likelihood that America would be seen as doing more harm than good.

The success of a frame depends on a variety of factors. Chief among these factors are the personal qualities of the frame recipient (Brewer 2001, Druckman and Nelson 2003, Entman

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4 Since framing works by influencing the relative salience of beliefs, it framing only indirectly influences opinions. In contrast, persuasion directly revises beliefs. What was once seen favorably is now seen as unfavorable or vice versa.

5 While framing effects work to change salience, persuasion works on transforming underlying beliefs. For example, a persuasive message would try to convince the individual that American foreign aid and access to U.S. capital markets are detrimental. As a result, what was once seen as a “good thing” – foreign aid and capital – would now be seen as harmful. As seen in this example, framing and persuasion work through different processes but have the same net effect: an increase in the likelihood that the United States is seen as doing harm.

In this experiment, we vary a third factor, the identity of the messenger who conveys the frame. Recent research into framing effects has emphasized the importance of the frame’s source. If the frame is attributed to a knowledgeable or credible authority, it is more likely to be accepted (Bianco 1994; Buda and Zhang 2000; Dholakia and Sternthal 1977; Iyengar and Kinder 1985; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Page et al. 1987, Druckman 2001, Lupia 2002). Receivers are more likely to agree with a speaker to whom they attribute personal, partisan or ideological affinity (Kuklinski and Hurley 1996; Nelson and Garst 2005; O’Keefe 2002; Zaller 1992). Conversely, if receivers believe the speaker to be biased, the message may be discounted (Joslyn and Haider-Markel 2002, 2006). When the message is inconsistent with the receiver’s expectations, it is likely to be heavily scrutinized (Ziegler, Diehl and Ruther 2002).

These studies suggest that well-designed public diplomatic communication efforts may be effective when applying lessons from studies of framing effects. However, such applications raise the question of whether framing effects are durable or invalidated by interpersonal communication about an issue. Research done in the United States on domestic political opinions suggests that the effect of receiving a frame from an esteemed authority can be invalidated by subsequent interpersonal communication or group deliberation about an issue if the group includes people with opposing views (Mutz 2002; Druckman and Nelson 2003). These discussions may cause participant opinions to converge (Vinokur and Bernstein 1978), but a contentious debate may also lead to a strengthening of pre-existing attitudes (Sieck and Yates 1997). If the group is homogenous, one study suggests that the views of the group may become more extreme after receiving a frame (Isenberg 1986). Group decisions are also more likely to select risky or extreme options (Rutledge 1993). However, very few studies have been conducted outside of North America and Western Europe, so little is known how group dynamics influence opinion in other cultural contexts. Furthermore, there are no published studies that we know of that have specifically examined the effect of group conversations on views of the United States.

Selecting Central Asia

Since personal characteristics of the frame recipient matters, we selected participants from two countries in Central Asia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. A cultural tradition that is both
formerly Soviet and predominantly Muslim provides us with a particularly interesting and important set of national characteristics for understanding the efficacy of American public diplomacy. Furthermore, these two countries’ histories, economies, size are relatively similar and their citizens enjoy enough political freedom to allow an unencumbered discussion about politics. Within these countries there is comparable heterogeneity in orientation towards the West in general, attitudes towards Russia, and Islamic religious practice.

There are theoretical reasons to examine the influence of public diplomacy in these countries. The Central Asian context represents a most likely case for public diplomacy to influence subjects; if we find no influence in Central Asia, public diplomacy will be even less likely to succeed elsewhere. The post-Soviet Central Asian populations had little contact with the United States before 2001. A light US foreign policy footprint in the 1990s in the region was accompanied by important changes in how Central Asian publics viewed the US (Schatz 2008). Even after 2001, US-Central Asian relations remain relatively shallow compared to many other regions. In contrast, consider Latin America where residents’ opinion of the US has been conditioned by centuries-long relations with the United States (McPherson 2006). It could be that when negative images become lodged in everyday social imaginaries, institutionalized informally in a society’s political structures, and routinized and normalized in a society’s political culture, they may be particularly difficult to address. The absence of a dominating US political or cultural presence in Central Asia creates a rich opportunity for communication efforts to burnish opinion towards the US.

Since September 11, 2001, American involvement in Central Asia became more active as the result of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, but engagement in each country varied. In Kyrgyzstan, the US established a large airbase at Manas but was forced to withdraw in early 2009 by the government under pressure from Russia and in the face of public dissent over the American military presence and the amount of rent paid to utilize the base (Abrisaev 2009). In Tajikistan, the U.S. was not able to establish a military base, but did provide millions of dollars to build a bridge across the Pyanzh River connecting Tajikistan with Afghanistan (Beehner 2005). There is little American development, cultural or political engagement beyond

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6 We did not recruit participants in Kazakhstan because Kazakhstan has enjoyed a decade of oil based wealth accumulation that has transformed Kazakh society, potentially creating international differences within a sample that would have been difficult to control for with our small samples. We did not recruit participants in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan because conducting focus groups or distributing questionnaires about the United States in these two, hard authoritarian contexts would have been problematic, at best, in the mid-2000s.
these efforts. Consequently, from these two countries we hoped to recruit respondents with a range of views that might reflect the diversity of views in Central Asia while allowing for both small, but potentially significant national differences.

Furthermore, the region is majority-Muslim, a particularly important yet unexplored terrain for discerning the potential impact of framing efforts. Central Asia is an especially promising arena for research within the Muslim world because it has developed an ambivalent general attitude towards the United States (Schatz 2008). Central Asia harbors neither the largely anti-American sentiments of parts of the Middle East, nor the predominantly pro-American sentiments of parts of Bosnia, Albania, and Kosovo. As a result, we might expect that messages about the U.S. would neither be immediately dismissed nor readily embraced, a fertile environment for observing framing effects.

Apart from the theoretical leverage that studying Central Asia provides, it is a region of crucial relevance to policymakers. American relations with Iran, Central Asian energy resources and the evolving strategic interactions with Russia and China contribute to the region’s significance. Although we cannot claim that changing the US’ image will have a direct impact on how the region’s governments operate because there are relatively few institutionalized mechanisms for popular attitudes to influence policy, a deteriorating popular image of the US can complicate US-Central Asian relations, even if it does not typically cause policy reversals (see Cooley 2008*).

Research Design and Hypotheses

We wanted to know: 1) does framing affect attitudes about the US?, 2) do framing effects last, in spite of the variety of alternative inputs that occur within the course of a discussion with peers?, and 3) what occurs in the course of discussion to affect attitudes? To address these questions, we combined a framing experiment with focus group discussions in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2007. The framing experiment was designed to enable us to trace the possible effect of framing on attitudes about the United States. The focus groups were designed to

7 Thanks to Dr. Robert Austin, University of Toronto, for confirming the broad pro-Americanism of the majority-Muslim regions of the Balkans.
8 Authoritarian states nonetheless have complex relations with their societies that should not be reduced to coercion. See Wedeen * and Blaydes *.
9 Heartfelt thanks to research colleagues who acted as moderators for the focus groups: Sunatullo Jonboboev, Alla Kuvatova, and Abdurahim Juraev (Tajikistan), and Nurbek Omuraliev and Jomart Sualimov (Kyrgyzstan).
simulate a wide-ranging discussion about foreign affairs to determine if such discussion diminished any framing effect. In addition, the focus groups were created to allow us to explore what characteristics of discussion tend to affect positively or negatively participants’ attitudes about the United States.

We invited ordinary Central Asians to participate in a discussion about “foreign affairs.” Our invitation did not specifically mention the United States (on recruitment, please see the next section). Before discussion began, participants received a survey about their views on foreign affairs, including a paragraph-long statement framing the United States as a place of religious tolerance and a good place to be a devout Muslim. Specifically, the statement offered (in Russian, Kyrgyz, or Tajik, depending on the target group) the following:

America rejects bigotry. We reject every act of hatred against people of Muslim faith… America values and welcomes peaceful people of all faiths -- Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and many others. Every faith is practiced and protected here, because we are one country. Every immigrant can be fully and equally American because we're one country. Freedom of worship is an American value, and more than 2 million American Muslims are associated with more than 1,200 mosques in the United States.

We deliberately used a frame that had nothing to do with US foreign policy because we suspected, based on numerous prior conversations with ordinary Central Asians, that they did not appreciate being told how to think about foreign policy. A statement that emphasized the “good” that the US does via its global foreign policy would likely have been immediately flagged as a manipulation of some kind. By contrast, we expected that a statement about the “good” that the

10 Real-world frames are often more varied, more ambiguous, and often exist in competition with other frames. To make the analysis tractable, we restricted ourselves to a specific frame.

11 Schatz drew up the original questions in English and worked with native Russian speakers to create a Russian version. He and the native Russian speakers together ensured the faithfulness of the Russian version. In turn, this Russian version was translated into Kyrgyz and Tajik by native Kyrgyz and Tajik speakers. To ensure the accuracy of these versions, they were “back-translated” into Russian by different native speakers than those who did the original Kyrgyz and Tajik translations. Schatz evaluated these back-translations for their faithfulness to the Russian version.

12 We wanted to create a plausible frame and therefore based it on US government publications, specifically material from a presidential address (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/04/20020430-5.html) and material released by the White House Office of the Press Secretary (http://www.state.gov/s/ci/rls/fs/2002/10992.htm).
US does domestically would be viewed as credible. Since most Central Asians claim little specific knowledge of US society and domestic policy, we also expected that the message would provide new information to our participants and prove influential. The frame was thus designed to avoid calling out their suspicions of being manipulated.

The attribution of this statement varied randomly within each assembled group. The first version attributed it to “George W. Bush, President of the United States.” The second attributed it to “the newly appointed Ambassador of the United States to [your country].” The third attributed it to an ordinary American, “Joseph Johnson, an American citizen who has been living in [your country] since 1994, married to [titular] citizen.” A fourth included the statement but did not attribute it to anyone, allowing us to isolate the framing effects of the statement from any changes in opinion as a result of varying the attribution of the statement (Druckman 2001). As a control, a fifth version of the survey did not include the statement.

After reading the statement, all respondents answered four questions about their attitudes towards the United States designed to detect whether the treatment shaped opinions. These questions were:

A. Overall, your opinion about present-day USA is ____?
B. Do you think that the US [brings more harm than good]?
C. Do you think that your country generally should support the US efforts?
D. In general, do you approve of the methods and means that the US uses?

These questions were similar enough to be combined into a single index of expressed attitude about the US. We use this battery to examine whether attitudes towards the US changed after exposure to the statement. Thus, our first hypothesis was:

**H1: Varying the source of the message influences subsequent opinions about the US, depending on the credibility of the source.**

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13 To confirm whether the survey items seemingly measure the same underlying construct, we rely on Cronbach’s alpha, a common coefficient of scale reliability. The Cronbach’s alpha for the pre-discussion battery was 0.8; the post-discussion measure was 0.82. Both measures far exceed the minimum coefficients necessary for social scientists to trust the reliability of the scale (see Appendix for more details and the distribution of responses for each survey item).
After all respondents had completed the survey, the discussion leader (an experienced local researcher trained by one of the principal investigators) moderated a discussion about foreign affairs and the role of the United States. Each discussion lasted between one and two hours. After the discussion ended, the leader administered a second questionnaire to each subject. Repeating the battery of questions about their attitudes about the US, we could compare pre-discussion opinions to post-discussion opinions. This research design provided an opportunity to examine the efficacy of one effort at public diplomacy on opinion immediately after the message was received, and after the recipients of the message had an extensive opportunity to discuss its content and other aspects of US politics and society. Thus, we could evaluate a second hypothesis (based on Druckman and Nelson 2003):

**H2: Framing and source effects generally diminish in magnitude after a discussion with peers about the United States.**

Comparing pre-discussion and post-discussion opinions also allowed us to consider how the characteristics of a group discussion influence individual opinion. If messages about the U.S.—especially from peers—can influence opinion, then we would expect that individual opinions will respond in predictable ways to the discussion. If most participants have a positive view, we expect that positive messages would predominate and counter any negative source or framing effects (Mutz 2002; Druckman and Nelson 2003). If there is a wide range of opinions in the group, then we would expect individuals to be exposed to conflicting messages.

**H3: Group characteristics—such as whether the assembled group initially has on average more positive or more negative opinions about the US, whether the range of individual opinion within an assembled group tends to be wide or narrow, and the role played by the moderator—compete with framing and source effects in the construction of opinion about the US.**

**Sample, Data, and Research Contexts**

In total, 121 people, evenly split between the two countries, participated. Since focus groups are designed to assemble those from roughly similar social backgrounds as a way to engender discussion, we recruited participants through the personal networks of moderators and
their contacts. “Snowball” recruitment is appropriate for several reasons. First, we hoped that the
familiarity of a conversational setting with acquaintances would elicit a more natural
conversation. This may be especially true in ex-Soviet societies where network-based behavior is
typical (Ledeneva 1998). In such contexts, where personal relations are paramount, cold-calling
or broadly advertising a study could make participants reticent to share their views and
compromise the validity of responses (Rivera, Kozyreva, and Sarovskii 2002). Second, focus
groups are constituted not to be representative, but rather to generate in-depth, thoughtful
responses (Greenbaum 2000). Third, while we hope that our participants would be broadly
representative of their communities, our hypothesis testing only requires that we randomly assign
individuals to treatments in order to observe differences between each condition. Indeed, data
from the initial survey distributed to our participants suggest that our participants’ prior beliefs
and ideas were not greatly dissimilar from the broader society in which they lived.\footnote{Participants received nominal compensation for their involvement.}

We randomly assigned participants to each of the experimental conditions in order to
isolate the causal effect of each treatment. We conducted tests to ensure that no group was
overrepresented in any conditions and did not bias any of the conditions. With this population
and this design, we have sufficient experimental control over a range of different demographic
groups similar to the range of groups in the broader population to provide a demonstration proof
that framing effects can affect the broader population in the ways we have hypothesized.

Research was conducted in two locations in Kyrgyzstan: Bishkek and Osh. Tajikistan had
three research sites: Dushanbe, Khujand, and Kulyab (for details, see Appendix). Each of these
five locations has distinctive characteristics. Bishkek and Dushanbe are the capital cities of their
respective countries. They are more densely settled, more urban, more linguistically and
culturally Russified, and have denser personal, cultural, and communication links with the West
than do the other cities. Osh is Kyrgyzstan’s second-largest city, has closer ties to the agricultural
sector, is less Russified, and is linked by its physical geography and ethnic composition to
Uzbekistan. Likewise, Khujand is Tajikistan’s second-largest city, has closer ties to the
agricultural sector, and is linked by its physical geography and ethnic composition to Uzbekistan.
In these senses, Bishkek and Dushanbe share some principal similarities, while Osh and Khujand
share other crucial similarities.
Kulyab is different. A small city of approximately 80,000 inhabitants, it lies at a geographic remove from both Dushanbe and, especially, Khujand. Its economy is deeply tied to a struggling agricultural sector. Crucially, the Kulyab region includes Dangara, the birthplace of President Rahmon, who has distributed patronage to much of the Kulyab-born elite, although this patronage appears to have had little positive impact on the life of ordinary Kulyabis. Whereas Khujand in the north is the former site of (Soviet-era) political power and Dushanbe is the site of formal political power today, Kulyab is the site of informal political power in the country.\(^{15}\)

While Central Asian cities, like cities elsewhere, are complex and have diverse populations, these general characteristics provided an opportunity for recruiting participants in the surveys and discussions. Since focus groups are designed to assemble those from roughly similar social backgrounds as a way to engender discussion, we looked to Dushanbe and Bishkek for Russified participants, for those with high levels of interest in foreign affairs, for female participants, and for those with higher education; we looked to Khujand and Osh for variation in religiosity; and we looked to Kulyab for less educated and more rural participants (see Appendix for profiles of each of the discussion groups).

These distinctive site-specific, contextual factors required that we model a “site effect” into our analysis. As a result, we looked to see if the particular location of a given focus group had a discernable effect on attitudes expressed by participants—both before the discussion and afterwards.\(^{16}\)

Aggregate Results and Analysis

Let us begin by considering each treatment group in the aggregate. Table 1 shows the mean level of agreement with the statement, depending on its attribution:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you agree with the</th>
<th>Bush</th>
<th>Ambassador</th>
<th>Ordinary American</th>
<th>No attribution</th>
<th>No quotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{15}\) For an in-depth discussion of the role of various informal networks in Tajikistan and elsewhere in Central Asia, see Collins (2006). See also Schatz (2004).

\(^{16}\) Since each discussion leader conducted the focus groups in each location and was primarily responsible for participant recruitment, this location variable location also captures any moderator effects.
Agreement was measured using a five point scale, with high numbers indicating strong agreement with the statement. Respondents reported less agreement with the statement, when it was attributed to the unpopular President Bush. On average, agreement in the three other conditions exceeded four on a six-point ascending scale, but with the Bush attribution, the mean level of agreement dropped to 2.92. This level of agreement was different from the no attribution control at statistically significant levels ($p < 0.01$, d.f. = 92, $t =3.8$, two-tailed test), so we can be confident that the difference was not the result of chance. The average level of agreement was highest when the message was attributed to the US Ambassador, but this level was not significantly different than the control.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Discussion</th>
<th>Post-Discussion</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opinion of the US</td>
<td>2.42 2.72</td>
<td>2.68 3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.12 2.87</td>
<td>3.10 3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: Agree with the statement, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree; Opinion of the US is an index of four questions 1 = Lowest, 5 = Highest.
Initial opinion of the United States also varied across the conditions. As mentioned above, four opinion questions about the US were combined into one index ranging from 1 to 5. Before the discussion, those who read the message attributed to Bush had the lowest average opinion of the US, 2.42. By contrast, the mean opinion of the rest of the sample was more than a half-point higher, 2.96. Surprisingly, those with the most positive average views of the US before the discussion were those who had not read the statement but this difference was not statistically significant.

After the discussion, participants tended to have more positive views of the U.S. 71% of respondents had the same or a higher view of the US after the discussion. There was also a

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17 The difference was significant at $p < 0.01$ (d.f=116, $t= 2.46$), a result confirmed by a one-way ANOVA examining differences in opinion across all conditions.
greater consensus among our participants in their views of the U.S. Figure 1 graphically summarizes how views of the US were affected by the discussion. The boxes depict the interquartile range (25th percentile to 75th percentile) of opinions of the US, with a line in the middle of the box showing the location of the median observation. After the discussion, the interquartile range of views of respondents who read the message attributed to Bush narrowed and became more positive. The average for those with the Bush attribution was 2.68, nearly one-quarter point higher than before the discussion. More respondents who read the message attributed to the US Ambassador and without attribution also expressed positive views of the US. In the other two conditions, already positive opinions remained about the same. Consequently, the difference between those who read the statement attributed to Bush and respondents in the other conditions shrank. This level was still statistically significantly different from the average of the other conditions and the average response in the control condition, but at the more generous p < 0.05 confidence level.

The average (and median) opinion of those who read the quote attributed to the Ambassador changed even more than those who read the quote attributed to Bush. With an increase of 0.32 points, average opinion of the U.S. rose to approximately the same level as that of respondents exposed to a message attributed to an ordinary American, those who read an

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18 Measured by standard deviation, which decreased from 0.98 to 0.85, a statistically significant decrease at the generous p < 0.1 level (one-way, F=1.35, d.f. 117,115). Figure 1 illustrates this graphically: the darker boxes (pre-discussion) are generally longer than the lighter boxes (post-discussion). Much of this change was the result of fewer respondents in this treatment holding stridently negative views of the US.

19 See Table 1. Figure 1 illustrates that much of this change was the result of fewer respondents in this treatment holding stridently negative views of the US. The change in the median response of those who read the message attributed to Bush depicted in Figure 1 was a smaller 0.08 (from 2.67 to 2.75).

20 Whenever a measure that relies on some random variance is repeated over time, observations far from the mean will tend to appear closer to the mean when measured at later time-points. As a result of this phenomena called “regression to the mean,” respondents with the lowest (and highest) opinions of the US before the discussion should have opinions closer to the mean after the discussion. This should not be a problem in our experiment because we did not select on the extreme values and have a control group to use as a base of comparison to our treatments. Our participants were randomly selected into each treatment and subjects participated in discussions at every location with participants in every condition. Furthermore, while we observe a relatively large improvement in opinion towards the US among respondents in two conditions with poor initial opinions of the US, we do not observe a symmetric effect with respondents with strongly positive opinions having poorer opinions after the discussion. Instead, pre-discussion and post-discussion opinions among those who read the quote attributed to Bush and those in the control were similarly correlated. Overall, post-discussion opinions were correlated with the pre-discussion opinions at 0.68. Pre-discussion and post-discussion opinions of respondents who read the quote attributed to Bush was correlated at 0.79, while the correlation among those in the control group was a similar 0.74. Estimates derived from these statistics indicate that only a small part of the improvement in opinion towards the US may be due to random error.

21 For the t-test comparing the mean response of those who read the quote to Bush and all the other conditions, there were 112 degrees of freedom and a t-score of 2.1. For the comparison between Bush and the control, there were 42 degrees of freedom and the t-value was -2.4.
unattributed quote or saw no quote at all. The average post-discussion views of the respondents also did not significantly vary across each of the research locations. After the discussions, the vast majority of respondents expressed views that straddle the midpoint of the five point scale. While just over half expressed more positive views than negative views, clearly most respondents expressed some ambivalence about the US after the discussion, with few offering very harsh opinions and few extolling little but the virtues of the US and a close relationship with the US. This ambivalence reminds us that the US is a complex, multidimensional object, with an image that is complicated and drawn from a variety of positive and negative attributes. In an environment where people receive messages from a multitude of sources, any efforts at public diplomacy via framing should recognize that even the most positive, persuasive message must compete with other pieces of information about the US. Such a positive message might be expected to temper animosity, but it should not be expected to erase inimical information or views.

Two additional aggregate changes between pre- and post-discussion views are noteworthy. First, views of the US tended to rise. 71% of respondents had the same or a higher view of the US after the discussion. Second, there was a narrowing of the differences of opinion among participants after discussion. This is reflected in the standard deviation, which decreased from 0.98 to 0.85. This decrease was statistically significant at the generous p <0.1 level (one-way, f=1.35, d.f. 117,115), but was not large enough to be significant for any one treatment group. Figure 1 depicts this result graphically: the darker boxes (pre-discussion) are generally longer than the lighter boxes (post-discussion).

What lay behind variation in expressed views of the US? To better understand the sources of variation and how frames influence those opinions, we turn to individual-level analyses. Using multivariate regression in this research design with respondents in five locations across two countries allows us to statistically control for individual-level characteristics as well as qualities of the group assembled at each location (including discussion leader). Doing so increases our confidence in the validity of the aggregate results.

**Individual-Level Results and Analysis**

Our individual analyses confirm our finding that attributing the quote to Bush had a significant, negative effect on both agreement with the statement and opinion towards the US.
before the discussion. After the discussion, most respondents felt more positively about the US, especially if they participated in a conversation with peers who predominantly had favorable views of the US, after controlling for location.

1. Agreement with the statement

   We model agreement with the statement as a function of the source attribution, the location of the experiment, whether or not the statement reminded the respondent of something that they had heard before, age, religiosity, and two indicators of the respondents’ knowledge of foreign affairs: education level and how often they discuss foreign affairs. We analyzed the data using an ordered logit (Table 1).  

   Our analysis confirms that the Bush attribution decreased the likelihood of agreeing with the statement. When controlling for all other variables in the model, those exposed to the Bush attribution were predicted to give answers one or two points lower on the agreement scale than those who read the unattributed statement. The results can also be interpreted using predicted probabilities. All else being equal, the odds that an individual exposed to the Bush attribution would disagree with the statement was 5.83 times larger than for an individual exposed to a statement with no attribution. In contrast, when holding all other variables constant, the odds that an individual would agree with the statement are 54.3% larger when the statement was attributed to the Ambassador. Only the “Bush effect” achieves statistical significance.

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22 An ordered logit fits a nonlinear regression model that makes no assumption about equal distances between categories (see Table 1). By identifying constants demarcating the divisions between each category, the model estimates the distances between categories. The size of the coefficients can then be evaluated relative to these distances to get a sense of the magnitude of a one-unit change in each independent variable.

23 This estimate is arrived at by comparing the coefficient for reading the statement attributed to Bush (-1.763) to the distances between the constants. The absolute value of -1.763 is larger than the distance between the 4th constant (2.305) and the 3rd constant (1.478), so if all other variables were the same, the difference between reading the statement attributed to Bush and reading the unattributed statement is enough to decrease the level of agreement from the “agree in general” (the fifth category, above the 4th constant) to “rather not agree than agree” (the third category, below the 3rd constant). However, the coefficient is not necessarily large enough to result in a change large enough to move two categories from the highest level (“agree completely”) because the distance between the 5th constant (5.519) and the 4th constant (2.305) is greater than the absolute value of -1.763.
Table 2: Framing Effect I: Agreement with Statement (Ordered Logit Regression)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experimental Conditions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>-1.763***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambassador</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary American</td>
<td>-0.423</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Locations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishkek</td>
<td>2.201**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osh</td>
<td>1.963**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>1.659*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khujand</td>
<td>1.126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of discussion of foreign affairs</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>0.303</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary Educated</td>
<td>-0.563</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote reminds you of something heard before</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st Constant</strong></td>
<td>-1.354</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd Constant</strong></td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd Constant</strong></td>
<td>1.478</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4th Constant</strong></td>
<td>2.305</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5th Constant</strong></td>
<td>5.519***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R² (McKelvey and Zavorina's) 0.275

Legend: * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Each of the research locations was entered in the model as a dummy variable, except for Kulyab, the reference category. We used Kulyab as the reference because of its distinctive characteristics: respondents in Kulyab, on average, agreed less with the statement, were among the most religious, were the least well-educated and reported the lowest levels of interest in following foreign affairs. The coefficients for the other locations can be interpreted as indicating the difference between residing in that location and respondents in Kulyab. When using dummy variables as independent variables in a regression, one category (in this case, one location) must be the omitted reference category. The choice of references is at the discretion of the analyst and does not change the overall fit of the model. When a city other than Kulyab is used as a reference, the coefficient for Kulyab is large, negative and significant, but the other locations are not significantly different than the reference category.
statement when controlling for all other variables. This difference was statistically significant for every location except Khujand.

Other effects are notable. Across the locations, more educated respondents were more likely to disagree with the statement. Those respondents who claimed prior familiarity with the content of the statement were, all else equal, also more likely to disagree with it. Surprisingly, when controlling for all other variables, religious respondents were more likely to agree with the statement. However, these results should be interpreted cautiously because none of the individual-level control variables was statistically significant on its own, probably as a result of the small sample size.  

2. Opinion of the US

Two regressions analyze opinion of the US (measured using the index of four questions described above) before and after the discussion (Table 3). In both regressions, we include dummy variables for each of the experimental conditions and each of the locations. In the analysis of pre-discussion opinion (left column), we include several individual-level demographic controls. In the analysis of post-discussion opinion of the US (right column), we include characteristics of the discussion group in which the respondent took part and the pre-discussion opinion of the US. We first discuss the results of varying the source on both sets of opinion, and then describe the effect each location had on opinion of the US before describing how individual-characteristics and the composition of the discussion group influenced opinions.

Source Effects (Experimental Conditions)

The regression model indicates that the Bush attribution had an effect on opinions of the US expressed before discussion (left column of results in Table 2) much like it had an effect on agreement with the statement. Respondents who read the statement attributed to Bush supported the US by 0.564 fewer points than those who read the unattributed statement (controlling for

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25 When this analysis is repeated without the experimental conditions and/or the locations, the signs of the coefficients of these demographic variables did not change. Similarly, omitting these variables from the analysis did not substantively change the estimated effects of the other independent variables, as the direction, size and significance of the coefficients barely changed (results available from the authors).

26 By including this variable we intend to capture all variation stemming from exogenous sources of pre-discussion opinion, including the significant experimental result shown in Table 2 and the demographic variables included in that analysis. We re-ran this analysis with these exogenous demographic variables and found none of them to be significant and only slight changes in the size of the other coefficients (results available from the authors).
location, religiosity, engagement in politics, age, education and prior familiarity with the statement.) The difference between these respondents and those who did not read the quote was statistically significant at the $p < 0.1$ level.

### Table 3: Framing, Source and Discussion Effects on Opinions of the US

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV= Index of four variables</th>
<th>Experimental Conditions</th>
<th>Pre-Discussion Coeff.</th>
<th>Post-Discussion Coeff.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.567*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambassador</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.313</td>
<td>0.237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary American</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Attribution</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishkek</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.55</td>
<td>0.409*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osh</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.389</td>
<td>0.561**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khujand</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.499</td>
<td>0.740**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of discussion of foreign affairs</td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.020*</td>
<td>0.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary Educated</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.597**</td>
<td>0.597**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote reminds you of something heard before</td>
<td>-0.201*</td>
<td>0.264**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion group's mean opinion of US</td>
<td>0.264**</td>
<td>0.264**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion group's standard deviation</td>
<td>-0.420*</td>
<td>-0.420*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-discussion opinion of US</td>
<td>0.567**</td>
<td>0.567**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.864**</td>
<td>0.465</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjusted $R^2$: 0.12 0.54

Legend: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$
Bishkek  -0.55  0.409*
Osh -0.389  0.561**
Dushanbe -0.23  0.268
Khujand -0.499  0.740**
Frequency of discussion of foreign affairs 0.149
Religiosity 0.019
Age 0.020*
Post-Secondary Educated 0.597**
Quote reminds you of something heard before -0.201*
Discussion group's mean opinion of US 0.264**
Discussion group's standard deviation -0.420*
Pre-discussion opinion of US 0.567**
Constant 1.864** 0.465

Adjusted $R^2$ 0.12 0.54

Legend: * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

If the effect of attributing the quote to Bush was going to completely dissipate, we would find a positive coefficient for that dummy, indicating that respondents in this treatment had experienced a significant change in their opinions of the US over the course of the discussion to enable them to “catch up” with the respondents randomly assigned to other treatments. Instead, only the coefficient for those exposed to the Ambassador was much different than zero and none were significant. This indicates that the “Bush effect” only influenced pre-discussion opinions, but this effect was not completely undone during the discussion. This is consistent with other work that suggests that framing effects which are initially strong may weaken when individuals discuss their views subsequently with peers who have opposing viewpoints (Mutz 2002; Druckman and Nelson 2003).

Variation by location

Location only mattered to post-discussion opinions of the US. We included location as an independent variable in our pre-discussion model because participants in each place had a common set of characteristics (described above, including geography). Treating each location as a dummy variable enabled us to capture this clustering of characteristics in a study with a relatively small –n. Despite these differences, location (compared to Kulyab) had no statistically significant effect on pre-discussion opinion.
In the analysis of post-discussion opinion (right column), these same dummy variables capture something else—the effect of a moderator in shaping opinion (a different moderator led discussion in each of the different research sites). This is the case because any location effect on pre-discussion opinion is “built in” to the variable “pre-discussion opinion of the US.” We find that opinions of participants in Khujand were 0.740 points more favorable towards the US than those in Kulyab, all else equal. Respondents in the two Kyrgyz locations, Bishkek and Osh, also had a significantly better opinion of the US than those in Kulyab. The difference between Dushanbe and Kulyab, though, was not significant when holding all other variables constant.

Individual and Group Characteristics

Controlling for location and experimental effects, we find that older and better educated respondents had a slightly higher opinion of the US, and those who reported hearing the statement previously had a lower opinion of the US.

Consistent with our aggregate analysis, our regression analysis indicates that positive views of the US enjoyed some longevity. Holding all other variables constant, respondents with a favorable opinion of the US before the discussion also had a favorable post-discussion opinion of the US. For every point difference in pre-discussion favorability, post-discussion opinions were 0.572 points higher. Because this coefficient is less than one point, this result is consistent with the aggregate indicators that the range of opinions narrowed after the discussion.

The results in the right column demonstrate that the dynamics of each group discussion influenced the longevity of frame effects. To capture if peers, during discussion, had exerted an influence on individual attitudes, we included the mean pre-discussion opinion of each group. The results are clear: individual respondents in groups with a more favorable average pre-discussion opinion had a more positive post-discussion view of the US when controlling for all other variables. However, respondents in groups with a wide range of pre-discussion opinions tended to have less favorable post-discussion opinions of the US. For each point increase in standard deviation in group opinion, individual opinion of the US decreased by 0.420 points.

Discussion and Elaboration

The data described above allow us to assess our three hypotheses. We find support for the first hypothesis—i.e., that varying the source of the message influences opinions about the US,
depending on the credibility of the source. The strong finding of a “Bush effect” is most notable in the aggregate analysis and still relatively strong in the multivariate analysis. This goes beyond merely noting, as pollsters have, that global publics had a low opinion of Bush during his presidency. People do not merely discount a statement attributed to Bush, questioning its veracity; their suspicions cause the expected framing effect to be resisted and reversed. Thus, a positive depiction of the United States attributed to a non-credible figure has a negative effect on opinion.

Second, in line with our second hypothesis, our data suggest that the “Bush effect”—the most pronounced of any source effect we could discern—partially dissipates after participants have engaged in discussion. This is consistent with the broader literature that suggests that framing effects which are initially strong may weaken when individuals discuss their views subsequently with peers who have opposing viewpoints (Mutz 2002; Druckman and Nelson 2003).

Finally, we find support for the influence of group characteristics on individual opinion. Peers had a rather large impact on opinions, especially relative to the source and framing effects. Three characteristics stand out: 1) average peer attitude within the group, 2) the range of attitudes about the US within the group, and 3) the role of the moderator in the group. Groups that held relatively more positive opinions of the US before the discussion influenced individuals during the course of discussion; as a result, overall opinion in such groups shifted towards an even more positive evaluation of the US. However, participants in groups with a relatively wide range of views tended to have dimmer views of the US at the end of the event when controlling for treatment and other group effects.

Across the focus groups, there was a general shift in opinion in favor of the US after the discussion. We surmise that this is partially the product of the personal views of moderators, who were local researchers involved in a Canadian-led research project. By virtue of their willingness to be involved, they may have been predisposed to lead the discussions in directions that were supportive of the United States. Although the written transcripts show no evidence of overt moderator bias, we hold out the possibility that subtle (perhaps even non-verbal) signals and/or cues steered the discussions in a direction slightly more amenable to positive depictions of

27 Central Asians typically know much less about Canada than about the United States, but they are usually aware of a close kinship between the two countries.
the United States. For instance, the moderators’ efforts to ensure a lively, balanced discussion may have led them to ask for comments from participants they knew to be more pro-American or avoid frequently soliciting those who they identified as prone to long rants about the US.

Noting that the moderator plays a role in the formation of opinion opens up lines for future research. What personal characteristics of the moderator matter most (e.g., her credibility, social standing, personal charisma, cultural and linguistic fluency)? Future investigations might want to gauge the effectiveness of attributing a message to a fellow national (see Cialdini 2001). Recognizing that an educated native-speaker and fellow national in a position of authority over a discussion tends to significantly influence opinions might point to ways in which public diplomacy could be more successfully conducted, as we discuss below.

According to our models, group characteristics appear crucial to how the discussion modifies the frame and source effects. Our groups were drawn from a variety of different populations, suggesting that temporal and locational factors that may ultimately weigh heavily on the effect of group discussion. While a full elaboration of the qualitative data from focus groups is beyond our current scope, a brief comparison of focus groups in Khujand with those in Kulyab illustrates the importance of the local environment.

In one focus group from Khujand (29 January 2006), the discussion continually turned to issues of “freedom of speech” and “freedom of conscience”—to much greater extent than was the case in other focus groups. There are two likely reasons for this. First, many of the participants identified themselves as members of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), a moderate and legal political party whose members generally feel persecuted by the secular regime for their religious faith. Like the moderate Justice and Development party in Turkey (Yavuz 2009), the IRP argues that western-style human rights protections are needed to secure freedom of conscience. As a result, this was perhaps a natural topic of conversation for the focus group participants in Khujand (in contrast to those in Kulyab, as we discuss below).

Second, compared to other regions of Tajikistan, Khujand enjoys greater freedom of the press, and Khujandis take some pride in their relatively progressive political tradition. The private news agency Varoud, for example, was able to develop a nation-wide network of correspondents and a wide readership (Kamol Abdullaev, personal communication). Thus, freedom of expression

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28 Tajikistan has the only Central Asian constitution that allows religiously based political parties to participate in elections; the IRP has done so since the peace settlement of 1997.
was a concern whose salience in this local context propelled the focus group discussion along a particular path that ultimately highlighted one particular aspect of the United States.

By contrast, participants in Kulyab were neither members of the IRP nor did they participate in a place where free expression was a source of pride. In fact, because Kulyab was the President’s home region and therefore the site of informal political power, it was under tighter state control than was Khujand. This was especially true in early 2006 (when the focus groups were conducted), which was the run-up to presidential “elections.” During this time, the regime cracked down on free expression across the country but especially in Kulyab. As a result, references to such topics took an entirely different turn in Kulyab. In one case, a participant dismissed such freedoms, arguing, “In my opinion, people today are without work. They say ‘freedom,’ ‘free expression’…They say whatever comes to mind. I think that the reason for this is idleness and unemployment. Consequently, if all people were busy with something [i.e., work], such notions would not be necessary.” While one participant mildly disagreed, the course of discussion continued in general agreement with him. One additional participant chimed in, “Yes, sometimes some people genuinely discuss international affairs, but I think that anyone who has work does not have the time for discussions of such topics” (Focus group, Kulyab, Tajikistan, 2 February 2006).

The discussions in Khujand and in Kulyab took different paths, and the paths they took had a bearing on subsequently expressed attitudes. The paths taken may be the result of locally produced cultures (e.g., Khujand’s tradition of “free speech”), the result of different institutional configurations (e.g., membership in the IRP), of how country-wide factors play themselves out at the local level (e.g., a country-wide press crackdown that is particularly strong in one region), or of some combination of these factors. Future research could be explicitly designed to disentangle these micro-level contextual factors at play, keeping in mind that these contextual factors will surely influence real-world reception and acceptance of any efforts of public diplomacy. For present purposes, we can be sure that the local environment weighs heavily on the ultimate impact of a discussion on framing/source effects.

**Conclusions and Implications**

This study addressed the effect of frames and source attribution on attitudes about the United States in majority-Muslim Central Asia. By combining an experiment based on a positive
depiction of the United States shown to study participants with focus group discussions, we established several key findings.

First, in and of itself, a statement that depicted the US as a place of religious freedom and a good place to be a practicing Muslim had little effect on subsequently expressed attitudes about the US nor did it prime participants in many of the focus groups to extensively consider such information during their discussions. At first blush, this seems to indicate the limited efficacy of public diplomacy. A single, brief depiction of the United States seemingly has little effect on how foreigners might view the US.

In the real world, however, frames such as the positive depiction of the United States used for this article have framers. Consistent with the first hypothesis, the data suggest that varying the attribution of the statement had an appreciable effect on expressed attitudes. The existing literature emphasizes the need for the source to be credible for a frame to be effective (Druckman 2001). Even though they would surely be considered authorities on the US, we find that attributing the statement to President Bush or the US Ambassador caused respondents to be less receptive to the message. Thus, our second finding is that there is a deleterious “Bush effect.” The “Bush effect” is most notable in the aggregate analysis and still relatively strong in the multivariate analysis. This goes beyond merely noting, as pollsters have, that global publics had a low opinion of Bush during his presidency. People do not merely discount a statement attributed to a leader like Bush with little credibility. Instead, questioning its veracity; their suspicions cause the expected framing effect to be resisted and reversed.

Our third finding is that the context of the communication matters in a variety of ways. Let us briefly summarize. Discussion with peers matters; as hypothesized (H2), when participants engage in a discussion with peers, it diminishes framing effects to the extent that they are exposed to other attempts at persuasion and framing. In environments approximated by our focus group discussions, efforts at public diplomacy comingle with many other opinions, frames, and attempts at persuasion and have to compete with these alternative renderings.

Our results are also consistent with the third hypothesis that posited that who the peers are matters. We find that when an individual engages in discussion with people with high opinions of the United States, his opinion generally improves. If the range of opinion is wide, however, this tends to lower opinions of the US. The net result of these conversations is that while opinion of
the US improved, there is a ceiling on how influential any positive message will be on views of the US when less-positive information is available.

The moderator may also matter. Because opinions are influenced by those expressed by peers, even moderators striving to be unbiased may have an effect—perhaps via subtle or non-verbal cues—on the course of discussion, thus shaping the likelihood that one or another depiction of the US could become salient. Finally, context matters. The effect that group discussion has on framing effects is not uniform across space and time. Contextual, micro-level factors that are not reducible to group characteristics, moderator effects, or prior distributions of opinion may weigh heavily on the outcome of framing efforts.

What are the implications of this study for the conduct of public diplomacy? Public diplomats clearly do not have carte blanche to influence the opinions of global publics. Opinion is malleable, but representatives of the US government are constrained by existing attitudes towards the US and their perceived credibility. The research confirms that in Central Asia, President Bush’s poor reputation affected how individuals apprehend the US as a global and regional actor. The impact of the frame attributed to the Ambassador, while more tempered, nonetheless suggests that the consequences of Bush’s poor reputation on American credibility could outlast the change in administration. In short, the legacy of the global controversies that arose during the Bush administration may limit the capacity of US government officials to engage in effective public diplomacy.

Moreover, framers are not only constrained by their prior reputation; they are also constrained by the environment in which they deploy their frames. If frames are deployed in environments—such as that approximated by our focus group discussions—where they comingle with many other opinions, frames, and attempts at persuasion about the United States, they have to compete with these alternative renderings. Social groups constantly propagate their images of global actors such as the United States in ways that may be inconsistent (as is often the case with Islamist actors) or generally consistent (as is often the case with human rights groups) with the preferred renderings of US public diplomats (Schatz n.d; McAdam 2007). Individuals who enjoy credibility locally would be most effective at cutting through the thicket of alternative renderings.

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29 See Entman (2008) for an attempt to provide a conceptual framework for the empirical study of what he calls “mediated public diplomacy” in a complex environment.
For the purposes of streamlined presentation and experimental control, our study assumed that only the United States was engaged in framing efforts. This simplification belies a more complex reality, in which foreign governments (China and Russia come to mind for the Central Asian region) and many societal actors are also active. Soft power (Nye 2004) is clearly not only available to the United States, as Hill (2006) reminds us about Russia’s ongoing influence on post-Soviet space. To be effective, therefore, public diplomacy requires not just thoughtful repetition and accurate targeting; it requires attention to what “competitors” in the “marketplace of ideas” are attempting to “sell,” how effective they are, what “market niches” they occupy, and what approaches to public diplomacy are therefore most likely to succeed (see Zaller 1992).

At a micro-level, various cultural and contingent factors are at play that may abet or thwart framing efforts. Here, the injunction for the conduct of public diplomacy is easy to state and hard to achieve: know the context—not only at the level of countries or regions within countries, but at the most micro-level possible. Framing effects that might work generally in a country context might fail (or even worse—have an adverse effect) within specific communities. If the advertisements of commercial products are any guide, to be durably effective public diplomacy would likely have to be deployed regularly, repeatedly, and with sensitivity to the background characteristics of the target population.

Finally, our study raises the intriguing possibility that wide-ranging discussions about the United States may be more effective in shifting opinions in a positive direction than framing efforts that did not involve discussion with local participants. Such a wide-ranging discussion may touch upon many aspects of the US; doing so may trigger a shift in attitude more effectively than a narrowly targeted frame could. If individuals from the country in question who enjoyed a degree of credibility with the target audience could be found, such discussions could be expected to be particularly effective. More research is required to determine the efficacy of such discussions, not to mention their practical feasibility.
Works Cited


APPENDIX

Experiment and Sample Details
In Kyrgyzstan, we recruited 29 respondents in Bishkek and 32 in Osh. In Tajikistan, 19-21 respondents participated in each of Dushanbe, Khujand, and Kulyab. There were a total of twelve group discussions in these five locations. Eight to twelve participants took part in every group discussion, but most contained ten or eleven participants.

All but one group contained at least one member assigned to each experimental condition; seven out of twelve groups contained at least two participants assigned to each condition. The sole exception was an eight person discussion in Kulyab that did not include a respondent assigned to the control.

26 participants read the statement attributed to the ambassador, and 25 read the statement attributed to the ordinary American or Bush. 24 respondents read the quote without any attribution and twenty were randomly assigned to the control. 118 respondents provided legible answers for the complete battery of pre-discussion questions. 116 completed the full battery of post-discussion questions, 113 of whom completed the pre-discussion battery.

As we described in the text, we recruited subjects in hope that we would build a sample broadly representative of a variety of views within each country, but our sample was not representative of the population. 55 respondents identified as Kyrgyz, 54 as Tajik, four as Russian and five as “other”. According to the CIA World Factbook, about 80% of Tajikistan is Tajik and 65% of Kyrgyzstan is ethnically Kyrgyz. The largest minority in each country is Uzbek. Russians make up 12.5% of Kyrgyzstan, 90% of Tajikistan and 75% of Kyrgyzstan is Muslim. 75% of our respondents identified themselves as having a religion. All were Muslim except four Christians, three in Kyrgyzstan and one in Tajikistan. On average, the groups recruited in Kyrgyzstan were less religious than those in Tajikistan. Both groups were well-educated, with three-quarters having graduated from college. Most discussion groups were entirely or almost entirely college educated. Only one group, in Osh, were college-educated respondents in the minority (see table above). The average age of our sample was 32, older than the median age for each country (24 for Kyrgyzstan, 21 for Tajikistan)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Group #</th>
<th>% Female</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
<th>Average frequency discuss foreign events</th>
<th>Average level of religiosity</th>
<th>% College Graduates</th>
<th>Average pre-discussion opinion of the U.S.</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Kyrgyz</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
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^ Measured using a five point scale, low frequency = 1, high frequency = 5.