

Ethnic Identities, Language, and Major Powers

A Study of Public Opinion in Central Asia

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Public foreign policy attitudes

- Major powers' desire to exert influence abroad has been extensively studied
- What explains the variation in public attitudes in smaller states toward major powers?
- The case of Central Asian countries, Russia, China, and the United States

Why is this important?

- The large-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 indicates that expansionist states take into consideration public opinion in target countries
- Russian officials and pundits have stated a desire to annex Central Asian countries
- The proliferation of Russian culture in a given country appears to be one of the risk factors

Public opinion and foreign policy preferences

- Elites shape the public's attitudes on foreign policy issues (Zaller 1992)
- The public's foreign policy preferences are implemented by policymakers (Braumoeller 2013; Bueno De Mesquita et al. 2003).
- Political elites and public opinion maintain an interactive relationship, which allows them to influence each other (Sobel 2001).
- The influence of public opinion on foreign policy is normally limited, especially in authoritarian states (Baum and Potter 2015).
- Authoritarian rulers both shape public opinion on foreign policy issues and consider public opinion (Hellmeier 2021; Li and Chen 2021).

Identity, language, and media

- Cultural differences and material interests are key factors for explaining political behavior during secession and integration of states (Hale 2008)
- Language proficiency in metropolitan and regional languages is often cited as an important determinant of political behavior in conflictual situations (Marquardt 2018; Guinjoan 2022)
- Mass media can influence public opinion (Gerber and Zavisca 2016; Peisakhin and Rozenas 2018)

- After the dissolution of the USSR, Central Asian languages have experienced a revival (Fierman 2012; Landau and Kellner-Heinkele 2011; Zhiltsov et al. 2018)
- However, there is also a regional variation in the degree to which Central Asian states displaced the Russian language with their national languages (Seiden 2022)
- Strong economic ties between Central Asian states and Russia continue to support the relevance of the Russian language in the region (Jehan and Khan 2022).

Education and language

- The rising levels of education are associated with the rise of nationalism (Gellner 1983; Roeder 1991; Shcherbak 2015)
- In Central Asia, the Russian language remains the language of the educated and more socially advanced class
- Russia also attempts to play the role of a master of the region, which brews discontent among Central Asian elites

Hypotheses

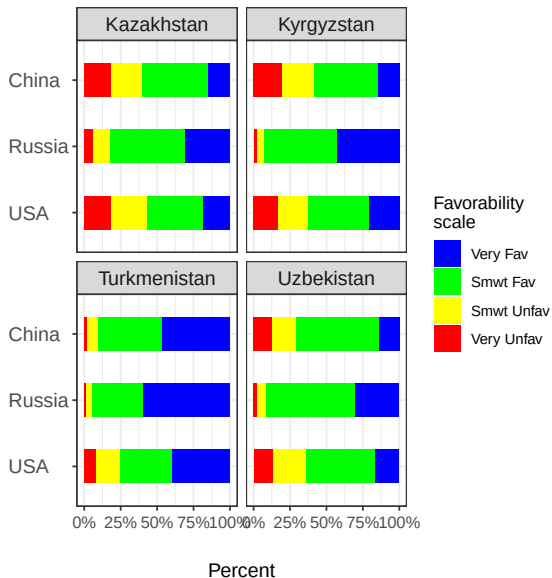
- A strain of more educated individuals among the Central Asian titular groups should be more nationalistic and view Russia less positively than other groups
- More educated members of the titular groups also tend to speak Russian $\implies$
- The interaction between titular ethnic group marker and extensive use of the Russian language will be associated with less positive views of China and Russia and more favorable views of the U.S., compared with other groups

- Central Asian Barometer Survey data
- Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan
- Waves 1-12, 2017-2022

The Dependent variable

- Four-level indicator of attitudes to China, Russia, and the United States:
 - “Thinking about other countries, please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of...”
 - Recoded on an increasing scale from “very unfavorable” as 1 to “very favorable” as 4

Average attitudes toward China, Russia, and the U.S.



Favorable View of China



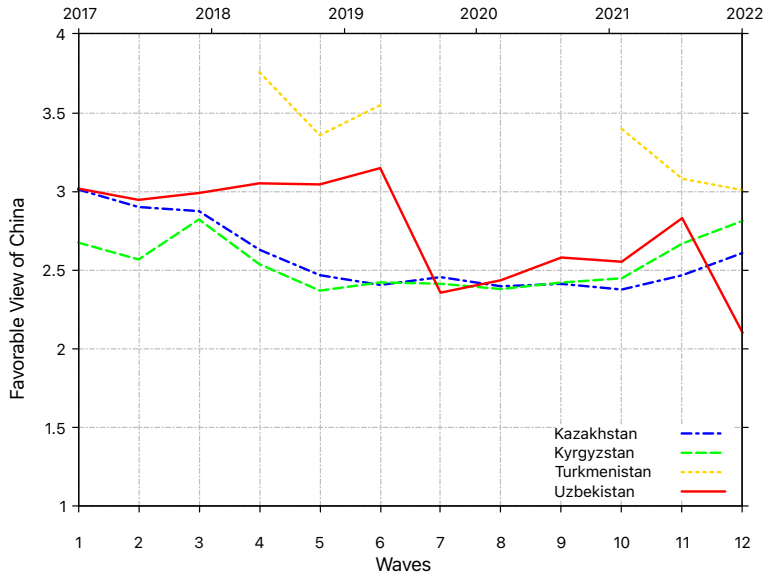
Favorable View of Russia



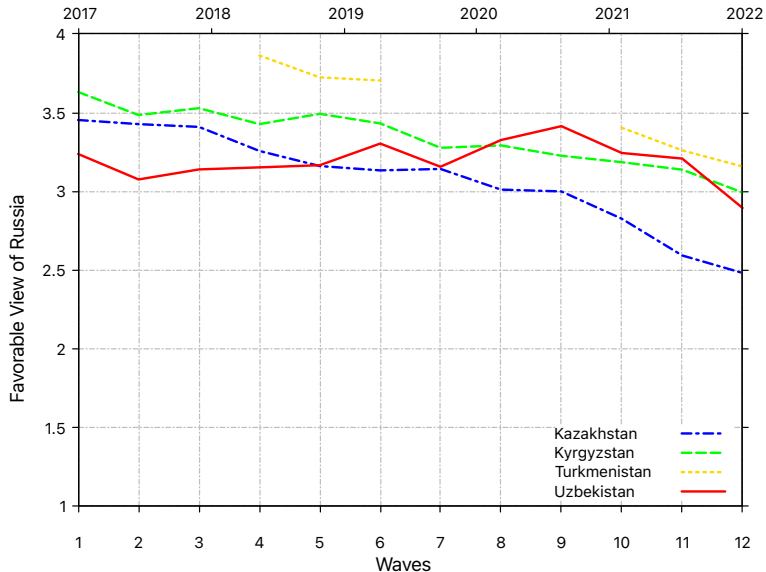
Favorable View of the U.S.A.



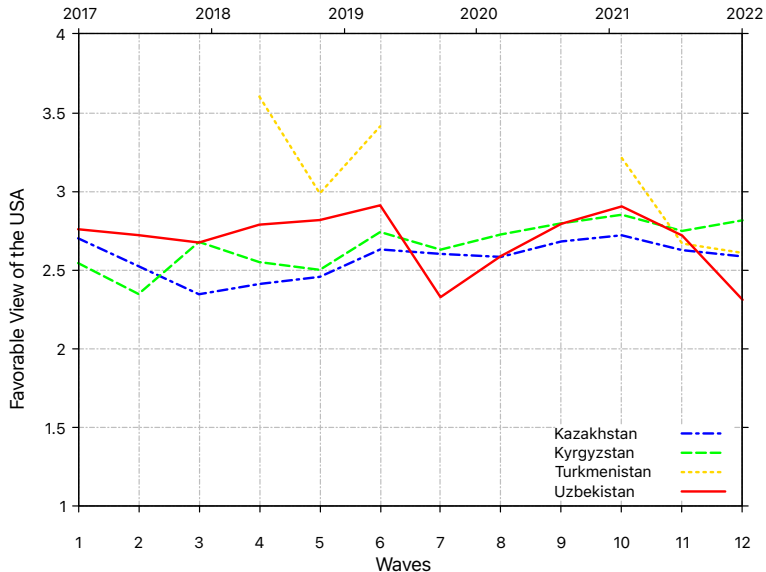
Favorable View of China, 2017-2022



Favorable View of Russia, 2017-2022



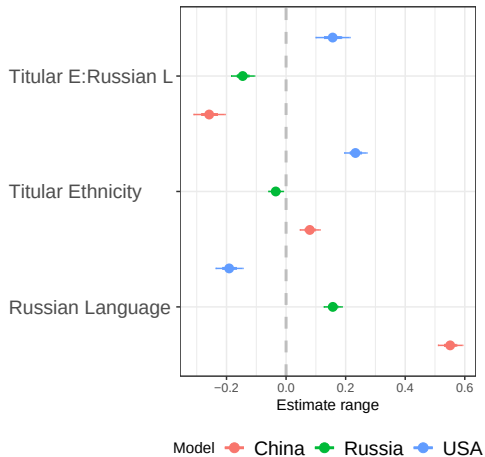
Favorable View of the U.S.A., 2017-2022



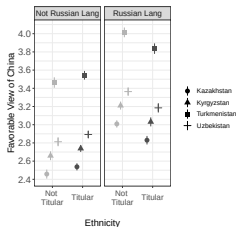
Independent variables

- Titular ethnic identity: Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbeks in Uzbekistan, Turkmen in Turkmenistan 1, otherwise 0
- Dominant language at home: Russia language 1, otherwise 0
- News sources on international events: Central Asian government media, Russian media
- Control variables: employment status, income, age, education, gender, urban

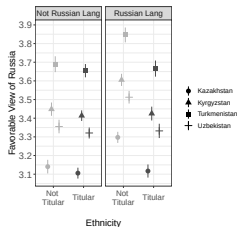
Titular ethnicity and Russian language. OLS with fixed effects



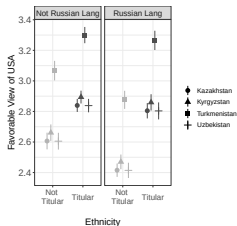
Marginal interaction effects



(a) Titular Ethnicity and Russian Language, China



(b) Titular Ethnicity and Russian Language, Russia



(c) Titular Ethnicity and Russian Language, the U.S.

Conclusions

- Proficiency in the language of a foreign power does not always result in greater affinity with it
- Russia and China have experienced a rapprochement in the past several decades. They appear to fit the same profile in the minds of many respondents in Central Asia
- The effects are relational: titular ethnic group vs. others, Russian language vs. others
- Russian language proficiency may be underreported due to the social desirability effect
- The relationships between ethnicity, language, and foreign policy preferences are likely to change if Central Asian countries continue strengthening national languages and phasing out the Russian language

The End

Positive View of China. Linear Models with Country and Wave Fixed Effects. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Titular Ethnicity	0.00 (0.01)	0.10*** (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.08*** (0.02)
Russian Homelanguage	0.42*** (0.01)	0.56*** (0.02)	0.41*** (0.01)	0.55*** (0.02)
TitulEth:RusLang		-0.24*** (0.02)		-0.26*** (0.03)
National News			0.08*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)
Russian News			0.08*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)
Unemployed			-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Income			0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Age			-0.01** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
Education			0.03*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)
Male			0.04*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
Urban			0.08*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)
R ²	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.08
Adj. R ²	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.08
Observations	55485	55485	42296	42296
Waves	1 – 12	1 – 12	2 – 12	2 – 12
Years: 2017–2022				

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Positive View of Russia. Linear Models with Country and Wave Fixed Effects. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Titular Ethnicity	-0.10*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.09*** (0.01)	-0.03** (0.01)
Russian Homelanguage	0.07*** (0.01)	0.16*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)	0.16*** (0.02)
TitulEth:RusLang		-0.17*** (0.02)		-0.15*** (0.02)
National News			0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Russian News			0.12*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)
Unemployed			0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Income			0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Age			0.01** (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)
Education			-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)
Male			-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)
Urban			-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)
R ²	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.08
Adj. R ²	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.08
Observations	59918	59918	45297	45297
Waves	1 – 12	1 – 12	2 – 12	2 – 12
Years: 2017–2022				

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Positive View of the U.S.A. Linear Models with Country and Wave Fixed Effects. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Titular Ethnicity	0.35*** (0.01)	0.26*** (0.02)	0.30*** (0.01)	0.23*** (0.02)
Russian Homelanguage	-0.09*** (0.01)	-0.21*** (0.02)	-0.10*** (0.02)	-0.19*** (0.02)
TitulEth:RusLang		0.21*** (0.03)		0.16*** (0.03)
National News			-0.03* (0.01)	-0.03* (0.01)
Russian News			-0.15*** (0.02)	-0.14*** (0.02)
Unemployed			-0.03 (0.01)	-0.03 (0.01)
Income			0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Age			-0.12*** (0.00)	-0.12*** (0.00)
Education			0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Male			-0.16*** (0.01)	-0.16*** (0.01)
Urban			0.07*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)
R ²	0.04	0.04	0.10	0.10
Adj. R ²	0.04	0.04	0.10	0.10
Observations	50155	50155	38596	38596
Waves	1 – 12	1 – 12	2 – 12	2 – 12
Years: 2017–2022				

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$