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 in our experiment were recruited in six locations 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. These views, however, partially dissipated after the discussion. When the discussion took place among people with higher pre-discussion views of the US, individual views of the US improved. However, when there was a large range of views in the discussion, post-discussion views of the US got worse when controlling for all other variables.