

# How Uzbek Media Presents the “One Belt, One Road” Initiative—A Case Study on Uzbekistan Today

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News is a primary source of information surrounding the issues that individuals tend to perceive as being objective. However, studies show that this is not always the case. Information gets exploited as means of manipulation of the views of the public—bias, hidden agenda—all present a highly subjective view of the reality. In order to get support on the issues and promote their own interests, political actors turn to framing. This study explores the possibility of framing surrounding the “One Belt, One Road” initiative in case of a news publication in Uzbekistan. Framing analysis to uncover the potential manipulation of opinion was employed, and the results showed the use of framing techniques in the news discourse.

*Keywords:* agenda setting, frame setting, media framing, framing analysis

## Introduction

News media, whether electronic, traditional printed, or broadcast, is one of the main sources of information about the world that surrounds us. Individuals turn to media in order to understand the reality, get informed on the issues, and seek resolution if those issues touch their daily lives.

Generally, in the realm of foreign affairs, that gap in information is bigger than it is with regular issues, and the only way to narrow that gap is to turn to media in order to get informed.

Part of the considerations in a functioning democracy is to get public support on the issue. Argued by Rounce (2004), the leaders have certain goals they want to achieve, but public opinion can either support or go against them. “Framing” is often employed by politicians in order to “shape” public opinion and “sway” it in the required direction. Framing can also be used to change public opinion to get support for the decisions already made. Salience or the importance of the issue, or how it is “framed”—the way it is presented to the public, can potentially affect the outcome of the decisions behind the policy. And when issues are not seen as salient enough by the public, the government tends to manipulate the public opinion (Geer as cited in Rounce, 2004).

Political scholars tend to characterize media as a form of “mouthpiece” that relays political agenda to the public (Baum & Potter, 2008). Media affiliation plays an important role in this assumption and will be explored further in this study.

## Overview of the Initiative

The “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) initiative was introduced 2013 by president Xi Jinping. “One Belt”

refers to the land route and “One Road” refers to the maritime route. In its essence, OBOR is an open proposal to participating nations to connect Europe with Central, Western, and Southern Asia, and also Middle East and East and North Africa. Indeo argues that Central Asia being at the center of the imagined route will also be central to the initiative itself. The initiative is based upon economic, social, and political cooperation; it is aimed at improving connectivity of previously separated regions as well as all the nations along the route and promoting their integration into the global economy. The initiative is also geared towards the promotion of the overall geopolitical stability in the regions (“China’s Belt and Road”, 2017).

Swaine argues that just as much as the initiative presents the certain benefits, it however, also presents many uncertainties. The success or failure of such a large scale project largely depends on the transition from “rhetoric and slogans” to development of action plans with considerations for the actual needs and capabilities of the nations involved (Swaine, 2015).

### **The Case**

Uzbekistan Today is an international bilingual news publication distributed in more than 45 countries, mainly in the CIS region and Central Asia, and is closely affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan. It is published on a weekly basis in both electronic and traditional formats in English and Russian languages. It mainly explores the topics of politics but also business and innovation, finance, social, and tourism. The publication is self-referred to as “a business card of Uzbekistan” (“About Us|Uzbekistan Today”, n.d.).

This study tries to explore the possibility of frame setting in case of Uzbekistan media, specifically, the news publication Uzbekistan Today due to its affiliation and examine how it presents the OBOR initiative, but does not mean to be an comprehensive in-depth study of the issue of media framing in Uzbekistan, therefore several elements of case study are not being considered, such as historical, ethnographic, and other situational factors. Further research on the topic can be justified if the presence of elements of media framing is identified.

Framing is concerned with how the information is presented. That said, this study will examine the following research question: How Uzbekistan Today presents the “One Belt, One Road initiative”?

Theories of agenda setting and framing will be examined in the process of the research. Literature review will examine the assumptions behind media ownership, and examine the so-called “policy marketplace framework” developed to explain the complex relationships among the media, the leaders as the foreign policy makers, and the public who is the central part of this system in a democratic nation such as Uzbekistan.

Framing analysis will be performed using language cues and tones.

### **Literature Review**

This study is concerned with the agenda-setting theory, specifically the second level of agenda setting—framing.

#### **Agenda Setting and Types**

McCombs and Shaw first introduced the theory in 1972. At the center of the theory is the idea that “media do not tell us what to think, but rather what to think about” (Smith, 2011). The relationship between media and the public is defined in terms of transferring the salience of an issue; this process is referred to as agenda setting (Yioutas & Segvic, 2003 as cited in Baird, n.d.). The more repeated the attention is, the more salient or important the issue gets (Baird, n.d.).

Three types of agenda setting are identified: policy agenda setting, media agenda setting, and public agenda setting.

*Policy agenda setting* in a classical sense is when media has the ability to affect the policy making process. Cobb and Elder observed that in order for an issue to get on the policy agenda, it first needs to be triggered by a certain event and then spread to include public support (as cited in Baird, n.d.). And in order to get on the policy agenda, those issues have to be “socially significant” to a degree (Denham, 2010 as cited in Baird, n.d.). If the issues are common, it will be easier for the public to get support on them. However, this type is concerned with another extension to the original theory—reverse agenda setting, when the public sets media and policy agenda (Nowak, 2016). Reverse agenda setting is associated mostly with the so-called new media, for example, social media. Public opinion is learned, and depending on how salient the issue gets, it may get on the policy agenda.

For instance, Hongfeng and Dunn studied the case of the controversial PX chemical project that was issued by the municipal government of Xiamen. They found that the discussions that took place on various social media about the adverse effects of the project at the time of the proposal affected the final decision of the government not to proceed with it in the end.

*Media agenda setting* is concerned with whom and what sets the policy and public agenda. Press releases and political conferences are some of the events that influence media agenda, the so-called supplies of information. Media affiliation is one of the important factors that influence the agenda. Baird argues that affiliation influences “the angle” in which, for example, the news, are presented to the public.

*Public agenda setting* deals with the response, for example, from the policy agenda setting. It is concerned with how the public reacts to the issue once it is put on the policy agenda. Denham argues that the level of public agenda depends on how the issue is relevant to the individuals and how socially significant it is—the public is more likely to get involved if the issue affects them personally (as cited in Baird, n.d.).

### **Second Level of Agenda Setting and Framing**

Early mentions of framing go back to Goffman and his work in economics, although no clear conceptual definition was given at the time (Smith, 2011; Scheufele, 1999). Later studies, however, define framing more clearly. Entman suggests that framing is used “...to promote a particular problem definition,...interpretation,...evaluation and/or treatment recommendation” (Moy & Bosch, 2013, p.51). McCombs et al. suggested that agenda setting and framing are closely related to each other and that framing is an extension of the initial theory and presents the second level of agenda setting, specifically, that framing is concerned with the “*salience of issue attributes*” and that the second level of agenda setting, or “frame setting”, is the “*transmission of the attributes of salience*”—classified as *media frames* in media agenda setting. Price et al. (1995) suggests that frame setting “*systematically affect[s] how recipients of the news come to understand these events*”—classified as *individual frames* in public agenda setting (Scheufele, 1999).

Individual frames result in a certain interpretation of the issue based on individuals’ own perception of reality.

Media frames result in how information is relayed to the audience in a suggestive manner and presents the view of the media (Scheufele, 1999). This study is concerned with media frame setting. The following literature will primarily discuss the theory of media frames.

### **Media Frame Setting**

Researches show that media actually “shape” public opinion (e.g., Paletz, 2002 as cited in Baum & Potter, 2008). In their view, media in the discourse frames the information, and that politicians influence the information content even though media is often seen as a “dedicated” actor (Scheufele, 1999; Baum & Potter, 2008). They also argue that media influences the relationship between public opinion and policies, specifically foreign policies. In order to explain the complex relationship among media, opinion, and foreign policy, Baum and Potter proposed the so-called “marketplace framework”.

### **Marketplace Framework**

Just like in the market economy, in the foreign policy marketplace, information is the main commodity. The players on this market are the public, the media, and the leaders (or politicians). Both the public and the leaders are interested in creating a policy that will suit their needs and preferences. But these needs and preferences can sometimes conflict. When the conflict happens, the only way to shift the so-called market equilibrium is with information. In a democratic country, such as Uzbekistan, the public should have the power of decision making. But at least, when it comes to foreign affairs, the public does not have much information to formulate the decision, the leaders do. Such gap in information effectively makes the leaders “dictate” the foreign policy.

The third player on the market is media. Media acts as traders of information. Again, borrowing the analogy from economics, the leaders control the supply of information. And that exact information makes the majority of content of the news. In order to maintain the supply or access to information, media is under pressure not to “fix” it and use it as it is. However, the demand from the public puts media under equal pressure to present objective information in order to maintain the audience. This equilibrium affects the outcome of the foreign policy. This equilibrium, just like with supply and demand, can be scientifically analyzed by observing the distribution of information.

This definition of the foreign policy market depends on the fact that the leaders and the media are primarily subjective, and the goal is not to present objective information. The leaders have little incentive to present “unframed” information, and as it was noted above, in order for the media, specifically the news media, to have the supply, they tend to present the subjective information which defeats the purpose of the news media itself—to present as much objective information as possible (e.g., Hamilton, 2003 as cited in Baum & Potter, 2008).

The information supplied by the leaders must to a certain degree represent the objective reality as to not make the public doubt it outright—the idea referred to as “the elasticity of reality”. But the general public cannot observe the objective reality out there when it comes to foreign affairs. The public observes the framed reality instead (Baum & Potter, 2008; Neuman et al., 1992 as cited in Scheufele, 1999).

Short term and long term effects can be identified. In the short term, at the initial stage of the foreign policy, the public hardly has any information about the issue. This makes the leaders most active about “framing” it. In the long term, the effects of this activity decrease as information from other sources becomes available (for example, when independent media starts to collect and present information about the issue). Slantchev argues that as independent media, they can present relatively unbiased information and shift the equilibrium towards the public and narrow the gap discussed earlier (as cited in Baum & Potter, 2008). Indeed, Neuman et al. confirm this so-called “active processing” when individuals seek additional sources of

information on the issue (as cited in Scheufele, 1999).

The marketplace framework by Baum and Potter describes the media as a dependent actor. Slantchev introduces the variable of independent media into the equation. However, no clear definition of dependent media was given.

### **Media Ownership**

The main concern surrounding media ownership is: To what extent the content produced by said media represents the objective reality and does it simply relay the views of the owner or affiliate? Doyle argues that generally media ownership, or dependence, should not be a problem as long as several independent actors can also present different political views and representations of the reality (as cited in Odiley, 2010). When that is not the case, the “mean” of objectivity shifts towards the bias. For example, Luo (2014) in their study on Chinese “traditional” media, in the country where social media dominate the landscape, came to the conclusion that the government as a monopoly on traditional media is a major agenda setter. But scholars generally agree that media can be manipulated for economic, cultural, or other reasons in either cases of ownership (e.g., Hargreaves, 2003 as cited in Odiley, 2010).

Framing analysis that will be employed in this study can help observe the shift of the equilibrium either towards the objective representation or the more biased view of the reality of the issue. However, in this study, as it was discussed in the introduction section, several important links that could potentially present a more comprehensive view of the situation are missing.

### **Methodology**

This section of the study will discuss other limitations of the work, present the details about the study, operationalize the variable and, finally, discuss the method of analysis.

Several limitations were uncovered in the process of the study:

1. Interpretation of language cues and tones relies on the researcher’s subjective view (as noted by Stoughton).

2. It was not possible to establish inter-coder reliability, as the analysis was performed by only one individual, therefore the results are subject to subjective interpretation.

3. The content is highly latent and is subject to misinterpretation.

4. Most studies concerned with media framing are comparative in nature (e.g., Kiwanuka-Tondo et al., 2012). This study, as discussed above, is exploratory in nature and is concerned with only one publication and identifying the presence of the elements of framing in its presentation of the issue.

5. In their work, Stoughton uses “primary frames” to represent the overall theme of the article, as in one dominant theme is chosen to represent the whole article. Boydston et al. also suggest this approach, however, they don’t insist on it. Due to the latent nature of the text, in this study, the author was not able to single out exactly one category to represent a single article. Instead, all applicable categories were used (see Appendix B, the *Article Level Frames* column).

6. This study will not account for “frame dynamics” suggested by Boydston et al., but rather examine the case cross-sectionally.

This study is presented as an exploratory case study. Researchers define such a method as “*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context*” where the relations are not

clearly evident (Rounce, 2004). This narrowly focused method helps to explore the context of the situation that in turn helps to uncover the details of complex relationships.

This study will examine media framing as the independent variable. Media frames as an independent variable is what actually constitutes as a frame (Scheufele, 1999). To explore the research questions, this study will use “framing analysis”. This study will use Stoughton’s study as a point of reference. In their work, they argue that “...*framing analysis allows...to examine the structural and lexical feature of a news text to in order to deconstruct the newsmaker’s intended or preferred meaning, and the ensuing impact on public perception of an issue*”. Stoughton used the “Policy Frames Codebook” and applied its coding scheme to a number of news articles to examine the effects of media framing in case of environmental racism and the resulting policy changes (Stoughton, 2017). Stoughton’s work will be referenced throughout the study as a guide for the analysis.

### **Framing Analysis**

Framing analysis is a form of content analysis where coding categories and their precise definitions come predefined—in this case in the Policy Frames Codebook—later interpretation of which is required by observing the language cues present in the text, such as tones, use of “big” words, exaggeration, stressing, word choice, phrasing, etc. Language is central to framing, and framing analysis centers around “*signals in language use, ranging from simple lexical clues to word clusters to choices of syntactic structure*” (Boydston et al., 2014).

The chosen methodology for the analysis is suited for both automated analysis using assisted software tools and hand-coding (Boydston et al., 2014), however Stoughton employed the hand-coding method in their study as it had a relatively small data set. This study will do the same, as the data set is relatively small too.

**Units of observation—individual articles.** A total of 17 articles were identified and collected for the analysis; from June 2015 to November 2017. The English version of the electronic publication was used as the source of the articles to eliminate possible translation errors. Google Search and ut.uz search engines were used to collect the articles with the keywords “One Belt, One Road”, “One Belt, One Way”, “Great Silk Route”, “Great Silk Road”; only articles referencing the initiative were collected.

**Units of analysis—individual paragraphs.** Individual paragraphs that reference the initiative were isolated and put into the coding table for later analysis. As per Boydston’s et al. suggestion, frame cues are highlighted in bold; language cues are underlined (see Appendix B).

Boydston et al. (2014) developed the so-called “Policy Frames Cookbook” (see Appendix A) to “...*advance framing research methodology...*” by presenting “...*a unified coding scheme for content analysis across issues...*” (p. ). Two levels of frames are present in the cookbook: issue-specific and “main frames” (highlighted with bold, see Appendix A). Issue-specific frames serve as contextual definitions of the main frame types. It is necessary to know what frames are used to define the issue and what general patterns they exhibit.

The data was collected and quantified; qualitative analysis was performed on the data set as the result.

## **Discussion**

Twelve frame categories out of 15 provided in the Policy Frames Cookbook were identified on the paragraph level. These categories are presented in Figures 1 and 2. Distribution of tones and quotes are presented in Figures 4 and 5 respectively.

### How Uzbekistan Today Presents the “One Belt, One Road initiative”?

To answer this question, the data set will be broken down into categories; each category will be analyzed individually for the presence of language cues and tones that might suggest frame setting. Appropriate excerpts will be presented for every category.

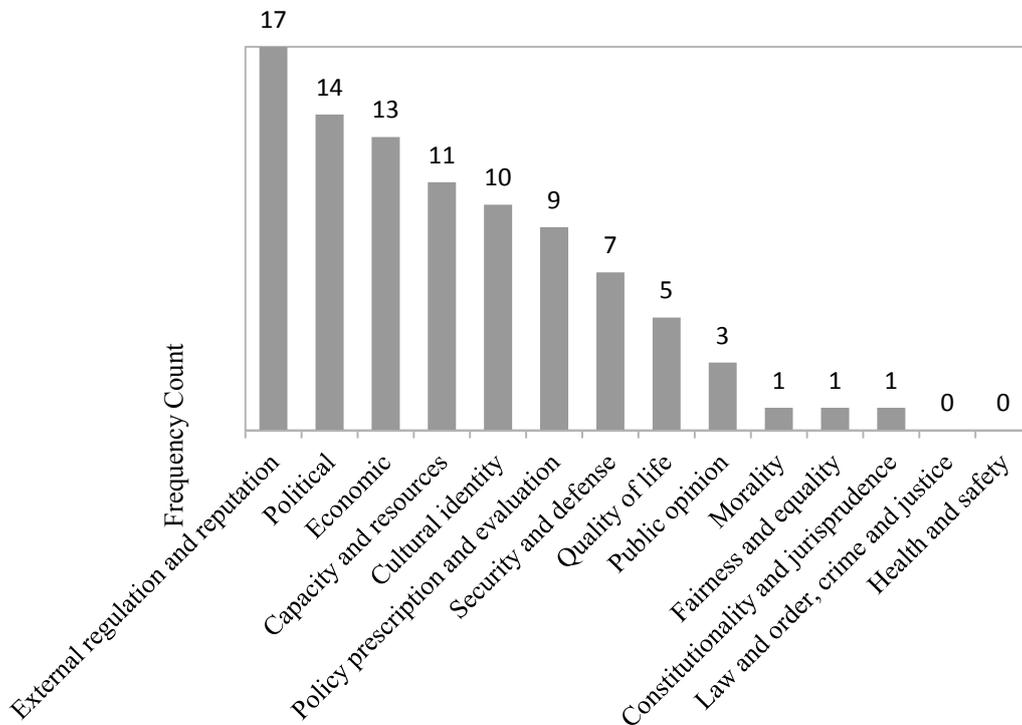


Figure 1. Distribution of frame categories. Categories are ordered by frequency of occurrence.

As it was noted, it was not possible to isolate primary frames; therefore multiple frames were used to represent a single article. The frequency and order in Figure 1 suggests the dominance and salience of themes within the initiative as presented by the publication; themes such as external regulation, political, economic, capacity, cultural etc. As it was noted by Swaine and Indeo, the mentioned issues and nations’ cooperation on them represent the whole idea behind the initiative. Boydston et al. (2014) hypothesized that certain frames are used more than others at certain periods of activity. They also argue that certain contexts and incentives surrounding them can show the use of the corresponding frames in the discourse. Indeed, as it is seen in Figure 2, in the context of the OBOR initiative where cooperation is the focal point, those frames appear to be utilized the most in the publication’s discourse.

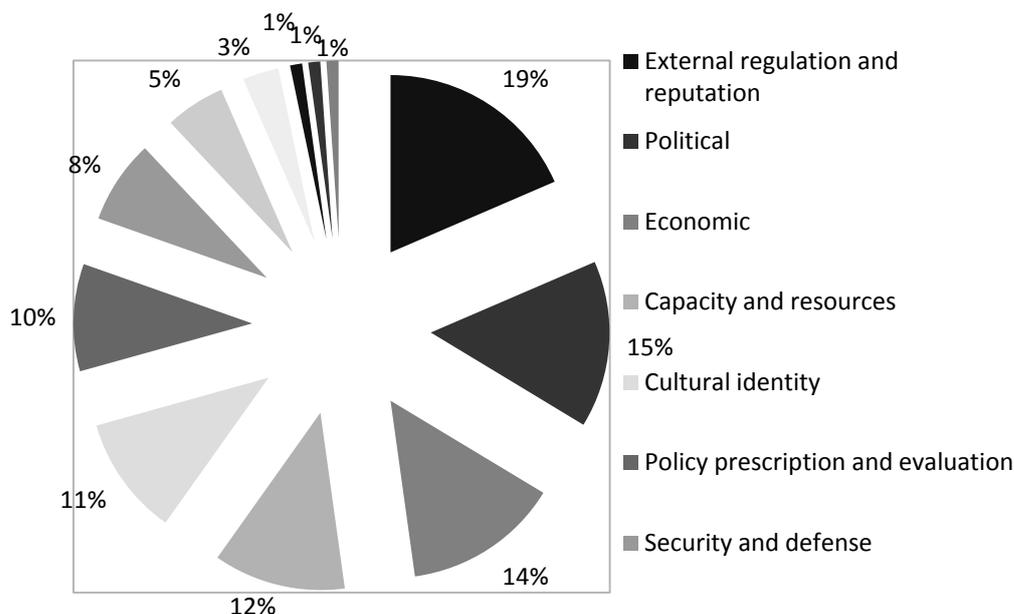


Figure 2. Percentage distribution of frame categories of the total amount of frames identified. Categories are ordered by frequency; 92 frame instances were identified in a total of 17 articles.

These categories will be examined one by one in order of importance.

### External Regulation and Reputation

External regulation and reputation frames were the dominant ones at 18% and were identified in all of the articles. According to the Policy Frame Cookbook, these frames are defined as “...external relations with another nation; the external relations of one state with another; or relations between groups. This includes trade agreements and outcomes, comparisons of policy outcomes or desired policy outcomes” (Boydston et al. 2014).

When referring to the initiative, the articles explicitly state that Uzbekistan is “an important link” in the initiative; cooperation within the initiative will not only “benefit” the neighboring countries but also the Eurasian continent and “the world”. The quote by the Foreign Minister Kamilov suggests the “high relevance” of making use of “the unique geostrategic position” in the context of regional cooperation within the initiative.

Quoting the Ambassador to Uzbekistan Lijie, one of the articles suggests that “great attention” is being paid to the Chinese-Uzbek relations and that the ambassador himself “is ready to maintain close contact” with the country and “strongly” support each other and strengthen cooperation.

The initiative “envisages forming and creating wide conditions for promoting new models of international cooperation”. Access to the sea is “important” for the republic; cooperation within the initiative is set to solve that issue. “Emerging new international infrastructure projects” and the “joint efforts of Uzbekistan and China” and other countries, for example, Turkey in them are described as having “strategic” importance for the initiative.

Cooperation within industries was also discussed as part of the initiative, as it was noted in the coverage of the SCO summit: “cooperation of leading scientific and research institutions” is one of the main points on the agenda.

International trade and tourism were among the most commonly mentioned points throughout the data set as a solution to economic development and cultural exchange.

In the articles, this frame is mostly represented as a call for cooperation and assessment of the past inefficiencies.

Use of the words and phrases, such as “*envisages*”, “*important*”, “*strongly*”, “*great attention*”, and “*creating wide conditions*”, “*advantageous transit link*” suggests a highly positive attitude of the country and its neighbors towards the initiative and its potential outcomes, as well as importance of these countries to the initiative itself.

### **Political**

Political frames are defined as “*Any political considerations surrounding an issue. Issue actions or efforts or stances that are political...deal-making...appealing to one’s base, mentions of political maneuvering. Explicit statements that a policy issue is good or bad...*”

Again, as it was stressed, the initiative will “*contribute to strengthening the country’s geopolitical position in the world arena*”.

Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in April 2017 was briefly covered in one of the articles. It presented an indirect quote by the president Xi Jinping about “*the significance, goals and tasks of this project*”.

Joint work of CIS countries in the construction of transport routes connecting the whole region to the “One Road” was covered as part of the International Press event organized by Uzbekistan Today in April 2017.

Most attention within the regional agreements was paid to the joint work of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and the “*mutual interest*” in construction of the railroad and automobile routes to connect these two countries to the existing Chinese infrastructure.

From the political standpoint, the initiative is presented as strengthening Uzbekistan’s geopolitical position in the world. The initiative itself is presented as significant and highly beneficial.

It was noted that other “*partner*” countries, such as Turkey, on the “One Road” route, as part of the “*fruitful*” agreements in cooperation that take place, see the initiative as “*the main factor for strengthening long-term regional stability*” and political cooperation.

“*Great importance to joint implementation of large-scale projects*”, according to the president of Uzbekistan, is attached to the “*mutual agreements*” surrounding the initiative.

External regulation and reputation and political frames go hand in hand, as many of the agreement within the initiative are based on the “*mutually beneficial*” cooperation. “*Reinvigorating*” the relations with the long term partner, China, is one of the most recurring themes throughout the articles.

Looking at some of the language cues presented in this category, such as “*contribute to strengthening/main factor of strengthening*”, “*mutual interest*”, “*mutually beneficial*”, “*partner*”, “*fruitful*”, “*reinvigorating*”, it can be assumed that the initiative presents big political importance to the participating nations.

### **Economic**

Economic frames are “*The costs, benefits, or monetary/financial implications of the issue...to an individual...or to the country as a whole*”.

In an interview with the foreign minister Kamilov, Uzbekistan Today writes that “*traffic flows are a highly profitable commodity*”. Foreign exchange earnings as the result of opening of the transport corridors will bring

foreign investments into the economy. Transport hubs, as part of the cooperation initiative, will “*hasten [the] economic growth*” and promote and “*intensify*” international trade, which in turn will give “*an additional impulse*” to the development of the economy. It was noted that “*the competitiveness of the products, manufactured in our country and the demand for them in the world markets have been increasing*”, thus the newly established trade routes will “*mutually enrich [the] economies*” of “*the involved states*” and reduce the costs associated with export. “*Dozens of projects*” are being implemented in Uzbekistan on the basis of the initiative, some of which have “*strategic importance*” and are the “*essential part*” of the reforms undergoing in the country.

“*Strategic importance*”, “*essential part*”, “*hasten [the] economic growth*”, all these phrases strongly suggest the presence of positive framing.

### **Capacity and Resources**

As it was already noted, Uzbekistan has no access to the sea; therefore its trade capacity is rather limited. The infrastructure that is being built to support the ongoing initiative, will allow the country to “*fully utilize [its] capacity*”.

On the part of Uzbekistan, according to the publication, it presents a “*very important significance for the project*” as it is located “*in the center of the One Belt*”. The so-called transport corridors that are being built will “*link*” other nations through this infrastructure.

Quoting president Mirziyoyev, “*Uzbekistan and Turkey have a huge, not fully utilized potential*”, cooperation within the initiative will solve this problem and allow for “*effective development of the transit potential for the entire region*”.

Looking at the cues in this category, such as “*allow...to fully utilize its capacity*” and that Uzbekistan presents a “*very important significance for the project*”, suggests that not only the project is important for the country’s development, but the country’s participation is also very important for the project itself.

### **Cultural Identity**

Cultural identity frames are “*The social norms, trends, values and customs constituting culture(s), as they relate to a specific policy issue*”.

The data set presents the idea that the initiative will help “*reinforce cultural ties among different civilizations*”. The initiative “*gave a new dynamic to the development of bilateral multifaceted relations...and cultural-humanitarian spheres*”. Tourism is on the agenda, as “*particular attention [is] paid to...modernizing a tourist infrastructure*”, which will lead to the desired further economic development. Another article referred to the initiative as “*strengthening our cultural and humanitarian ties [and] actively using the enormous tourism potential*”.

In November 2016, as reported by Uzbekistan Today, It was decided to document and depict the “*historic Great Silk Road...as it was centuries ago*”. “*Uzbekistan possesses great tourism potential, which is not found anywhere else in the world. The historical wealth that remained in the country can be developed and used for the attraction of tourists*”, says Jacek Pałkiewicz, member of the Royal Geographical Society in the interview to Uzbekistan Today.

The article also adds that the “One Belt, One Road” initiative allows for “*serious expansion of the partnership of countries in the field of tourism*”.

Another point in the data set points to a Chinese and Uzbek “*joint shooting*” of a movie about the Great

Silk Road. “*It will show the culture and traditions*”, notes Uzbekistan Today. “*Holding various festivals and cultural events*” was also part of the meeting agenda as part of the “*mutual exchange of experience in working on promising projects*”.

Presence of cues such as “*reinforce cultural ties*”, “*gave a new dynamic to the development*”, “*strengthening our cultural ties*”, “*enormous tourism potential*”, “*serious expansion*”, “*mutual exchange*”, in reference to cultural ties, tourism as a way to experience the culture and the initiative also suggests the strong presence of positive framing.

### Policy Prescription and Evaluation

This frame is defined as “*Particular policies proposed for addressing an identified problem, and figuring out if certain policies will work, or if existing policies are effective*”.

In order to maintain its position as a “*transport hub*”, it is “*relevant for the country to make a new state policy that will solve legal and institutional problems in the field*”.

As part of the strategy for further economic development, “*consistent reforms on modernization and diversification of industrial spheres, development of small business and private entrepreneurship, supporting exports*” were implemented.

The need for more “*concrete projects*” was also discussed by the president of Uzbekistan on the forum in Beijing in May 2017.

This call for action, as presented by the publication, might further reinforce the country’s intentions in the initiative. As it was discussed above, Uzbekistan has got big plans for the initiative, as it is the key factor for the continuous development of the country.

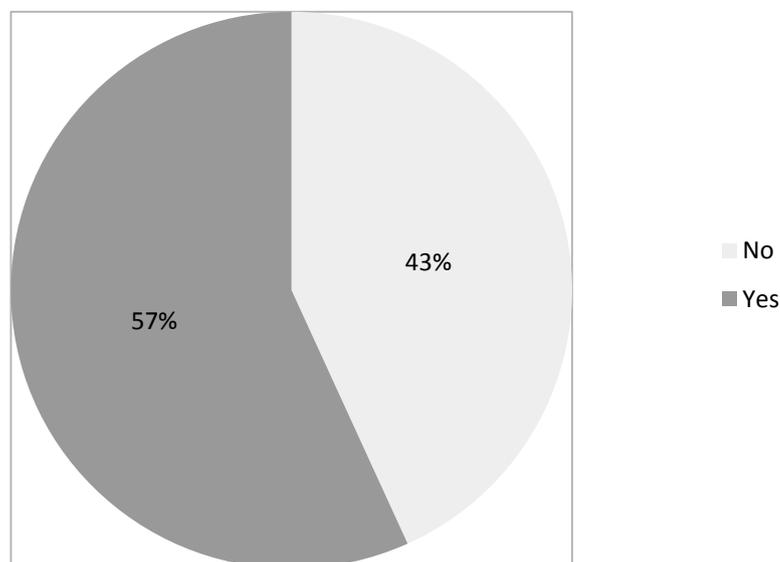


Figure 3. Solution proposition across the articles. Describe the instances in which whether or not solution was proposed to address the issue.

Solution proposition ties closely with the policy prescription and evaluation frame. In the context of this study, Entman’s (1993) definition of framing confirms the assumption that in most cases framing promotes

evaluation and treatment recommendation. Scheufele (1999) also says that framed information is relayed in a suggestive manner as to suggest the policy treatment. These factors strongly attribute to frame setting in the context of the study.

Explicit statement is that, as part of the initiative, legal and institutional problems in the area of transportation will be “solved”. “Consistent” reforms of modernization and diversification are already implemented, support for small businesses and entrepreneurship is there, the president’s words for the need of “concrete projects”—all strongly suggest that the initiative is not only beneficial in the regional setting but also in the perceived everyday life and that active work is being done to support these efforts. This combined with Entman and Scheufele’s assumptions, which suggest the presence of framing.

### **Security and Defense**

Security and defense frames are “Generally an action or a call to action that can be taken to protect the welfare of a person, group, nation sometimes from a not yet manifested threat”.

Argued in one of the articles, the reinforcement of cultural ties will help “promote peace” within the region. Noted in the editorial, the initiative gives “a new powerful impetus to the development...as the main factor for strengthening long-term regional stability and security”.

At the “fruitful meetings of the leaders of Uzbekistan and Turkey” within the initiative “prospects of military and military-technical cooperation were... discussed”.

In a press release by the publication, then interim president Mirziyoev stated that “The Uzbek side will...support China to safeguard its core interests and major concerns and combat the three forces of separatism, terrorism and extremism” under the “comprehensive strategic partnership by jointly building the Belt and Road”.

As it was noted in another article, “The Chinese side will continue to support...the efforts of the Uzbek side to strengthen the independence, sovereignty and security of the state”.

“Promotion of peace” in reference to strengthening the cultural ties, explicit statement that the development strategy within the initiative and the “new powerful impetus” it gives is “the main factor for strengthening long-term regional stability and security”, reference to the Uzbek and Chinese “comprehensive strategic partnership” within the initiative that will help “combat...separatism, terrorism and extremism” in the region strongly suggests the positive mood and agenda setting.

### **Quality of Life**

Quality of life frames as presented in the Policy Frames Cookbook are “The effects of a policy on individuals’ wealth, mobility, access to resources, happiness, social structures, ease of day-to-day routines, quality of community life, etc.”.

Cooperation, especially the Chinese-Uzbek relations, as defined by Ambassador Lijie, is there for the mutual “benefit of our countries and peoples”. “Mutual trust, good-neighborliness and friendship”, as reported by the publication as part of the initiative, are considered “necessary”.

President of Uzbekistan, as presented by the publication, “expressed his confidence that the project...will help create a belt of...prosperity and progress...on the continent”, and “stimulate socio-economic development”.

Words such as “expressed his confidence” that the project “will help create...prosperity...on the continent”, that the Chinese-Uzbek relations will mutually benefit the countries and people, that mutual trust,

good-neighborliness and friendship are important considerations—all suggest positive shaping of opinion.

### **Public Opinion**

This frame in the cookbook is defined as “*References to general social attitudes*”.

Uzbekistan Today reported that the president of Turkey “*accentuated the willingness of his country to elevate the relations with Uzbekistan to a new level, corresponding to the interests of the two countries*”.

Referring to the interview with Gu Guoqing, the head of the film company China Film Promotion International, about the joint shooting of the movie centered around the old Silk Road within the initiative, the publication quotes that “*the entire Uzbek people will be able to better understand China*”, which “*will bring fruitful results...in the cultural and social communication of our people*”.

Stressing the quote by the Turkish president that the country is willing to further the relationship with Uzbekistan, corresponding to the mutual interests, and that as part of the joint movie production the “*entire*” Uzbek nation “*will be able to better understand China*” and also suggesting the overall atmosphere of close cultural and social communication, the publication tries to convey the message of mutual cooperation not only on the political level but also on the level of regular social interaction.

### **Morality**

Morality frames are defined as “*Any perspective or policy objective or action (including proposed action) that is compelled by religious doctrine or interpretation, duty, honor, righteousness or any other sense of ethics or social responsibility*”.

One instance of the frame was identified. In June 2017, as part of the SCO summit, the idea of holding “*cultural forums*” was put forward. Suggested by the president of Uzbekistan, “*This will strengthen the ties and mutual understanding between our peoples*” as part of the initiative of promoting “*good neighborliness and friendship between the states and peoples*” and is attributed to duty and righteousness as it suggests “*mutual trust*”—another point on the agenda put forward by the president.

The overall positive attitude in this message suggests the presence of positive opinion shaping about cooperation within the initiative.

### **Fairness and Equality**

This frame is partially defined as “*...the balance between the rights or interests of one individual or group compared to another individual or group*”.

According to the publication, as a long-term partner, the Uzbek side “*support[s] China to safeguard its core interests and major concerns*”, which “*which fully respects the high political mutual trust between the two nations*”.

### **Constitutionality and Jurisprudence**

One mention of the frame was identified in the data set. It referred to the “*unified state policy in the field of transport*”, which “*would tackle legal and institutional problems*” the country currently experiences.

The idea of actual problem solving as part of the program also contributes to the positive mood setting.

### **Other Considerations**

Other considerations come from the excessive use of generalizations, which arguably, may not necessarily reflect the collective opinion of the public—the use of phrases such as “we see”, “we attach great importance” on behalf of the nation in the president’s speeches referenced in the articles.

The publications’ use of phrases such as “*The leaders pay close attention to the issue*” without quoting the

leaders’ actual words might suggest to a certain degree manipulation of public opinion.

The publication’s draw of attention to “*authoritativeness*” of international organizations that participated in the “Belt and Road” forum, use of approximations and rounding up the numbers, for example, “governments of *around* 30 countries, as well as representatives of *almost* 130nations”, all promote the perception of the “*grandioseness*” of the event and imply overstatement as a rhetorical device and a language cue used by the publication.

### Analyzing the Tones

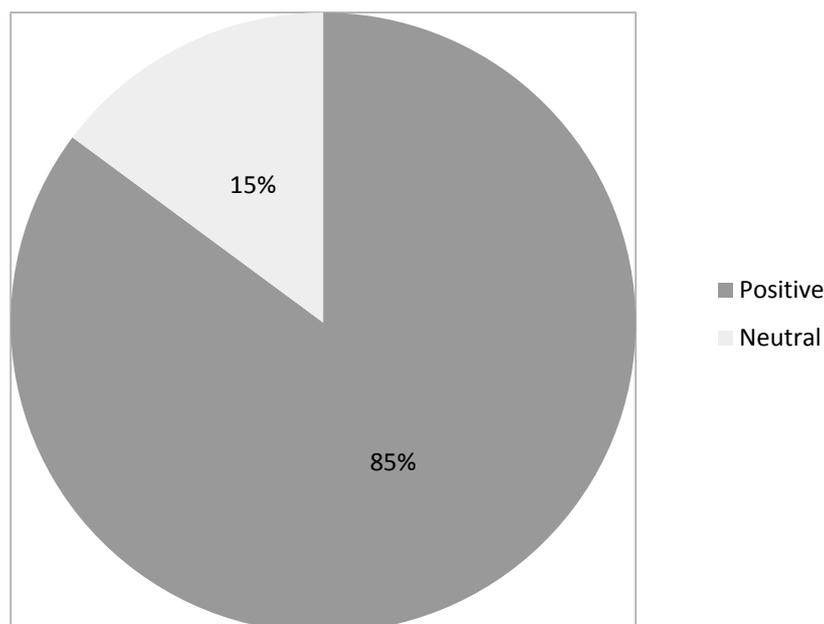


Figure 4. Distribution of tones across the paragraphs.

Boydston et al. (2014) strongly suggest to code for tone as an additional cue and an additional point reference. The tones are positive, neutral, and negative.

**Positive.** 85% of the articles were presented in a positive tone (Figure 4). This can be characterized by the amount of potential, in progress, or already existing achievements within the ongoing initiative. Paragraphs characterized by this tone present the issue “in a positive light and from a sympathetic point of view” (Boydston et al., 2014).

**Neutral.** Neutral tone accounts for 15% of all articles (Figure 4). This tone is attributed to non-subjective statements of either facts or general information. Paragraphs that are characterized by this tone do not discuss the issue directly and present it neither positively nor negatively.

Considering the prevailing amount of unnaturally positive references to the initiative, as discussed in the previous section, such distribution of the positive tone was expected. Negative tone, referred to as portrayal “in a negative light or in a non-sympathetic manner” by Boydston et al. (2014), was not identified in the data set.

### Analyzing the Quotes

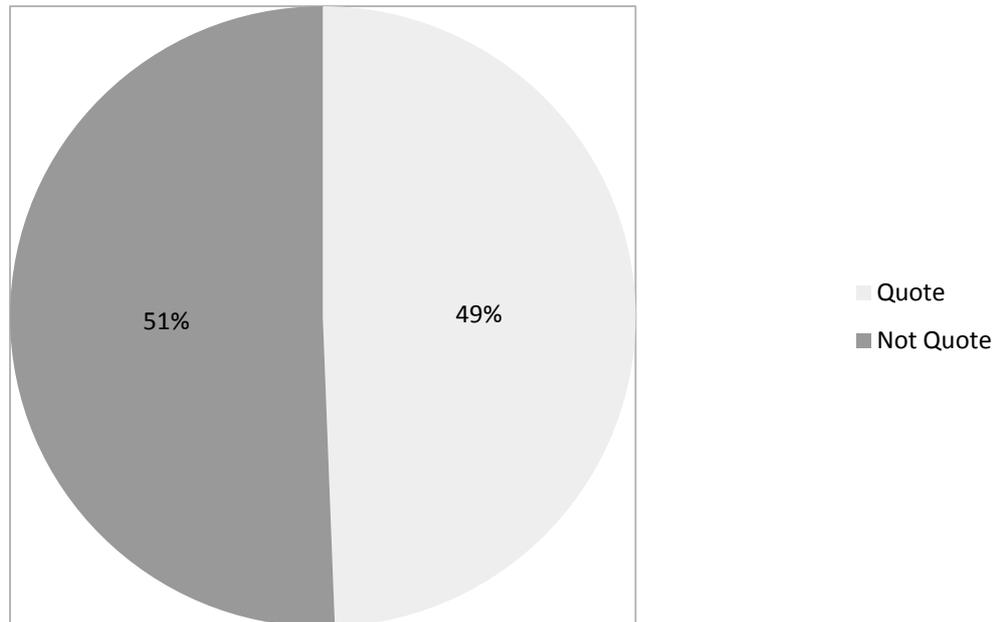


Figure 5. Percentage distribution of quotes.

Quotes and editorials see a practically even distribution across the paragraphs (Figure 5): 49% of quotes, which include direct and indirect quotes, and 51% of editorials. In the data set, quotes were identified to come from the president of Uzbekistan and other officials, government officials and presidents of other nations, and other foreign “actors”.

Such distribution of quotes can be explained by the previously confirmed assumption by Scheufele (1999) and Baum and Potter (2008) that media tends not to “fix” the information but rather relay it to the public as it is.

The information conveyed using the quotes of foreign actors was very positive in nature, as it was noted throughout the discussion above. This could be the additional incentive for the publication to relay it to the public as it is.

### Conclusion

Having examined the case of news discourse of the publication Uzbekistan Today and its presentation of the “One Belt One Road” initiative, the following conclusion can be drawn:

- The elements of agenda setting and framing were identified in the publication’s presentation of the initiative—the overall highly positive tone, use of words and phrases with strong meanings, accent on quotes, and exaggeration, the distribution of quotes and editorials—all suggest shaping of public opinion about the initiative and its presenting in a highly positive form.
- Uzbekistan Today’s affiliation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its highly biased discourse confirms the previous assumption by Baum, Potter, and Hargreaves that dependent media acts as a conveyor of political agenda to the public.

Further studies could examine the issue more closely by comparing the results of this study to a discourse of an independent news publication in Uzbekistan and further confirm or disprove the assumption about affiliation in the media landscape in case of Uzbekistan.

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