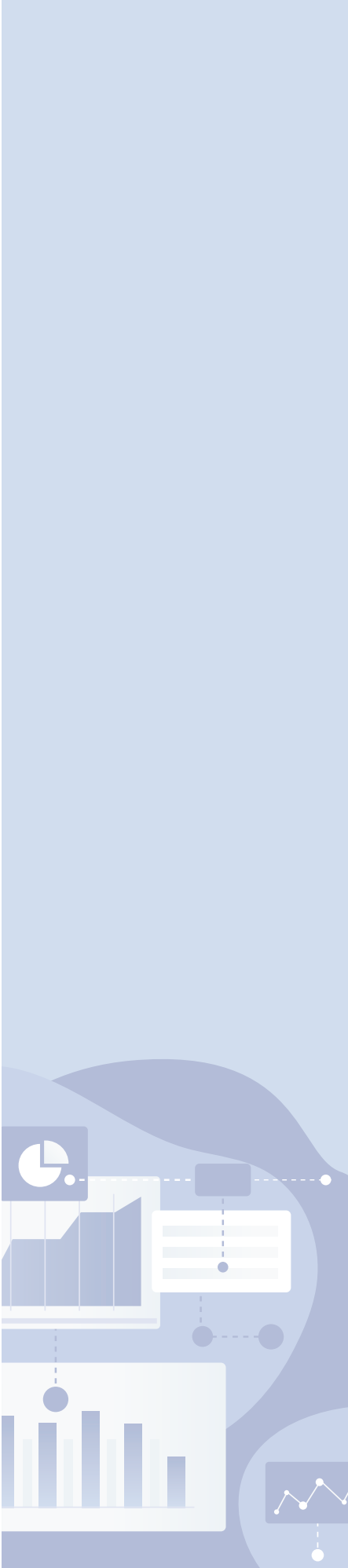




ANALYTICAL CENTERS IN CENTRAL ASIA: BETWEEN SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND AUTHORITY



Anar Musabaeva, an independent researcher from Kyrgyzstan, developed this publication together with Ermek Baisalov and Nargiza Muratalieva, editors of the CABAR.asia regional platform. An analysis of issues involving think tanks in Central Asia, it is rooted in views and assessments articulated at the ReForum, a gathering of experts held in Almaty under the auspices of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in Central Asia (IWPR).

This publication is intended for young experts and consultants, researchers in the social sciences, managers with decision making responsibilities, and for the wide range of readers interested in issues of public administration and public policy in Central Asia. The opinions expressed in the document do not reflect the positions of the CABAR.asia analytical platform.

IWPR is an international nonprofit organization supporting independent media and civil society in transition countries. It operates in 28 different states and began operations in 1999. © 2020 IWPR, all rights reserved. This material can be copied, downloaded, and printed for personal study, research, as well as for non-commercial training purposes, assuming the obligatory references are made to IWPR, the copyright holder.

This publication was designed in a framework of the project funded by the British Embassy and Government of Norway. The content of the publication should not be considered as an official position of the UK and Norwegian Governments.

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FOREWORD

It is a clear that Central Asian governments face difficulties in obtaining the reliable, objective, and balanced information they need from local think tanks when developing and implementing effective, long-term policies.

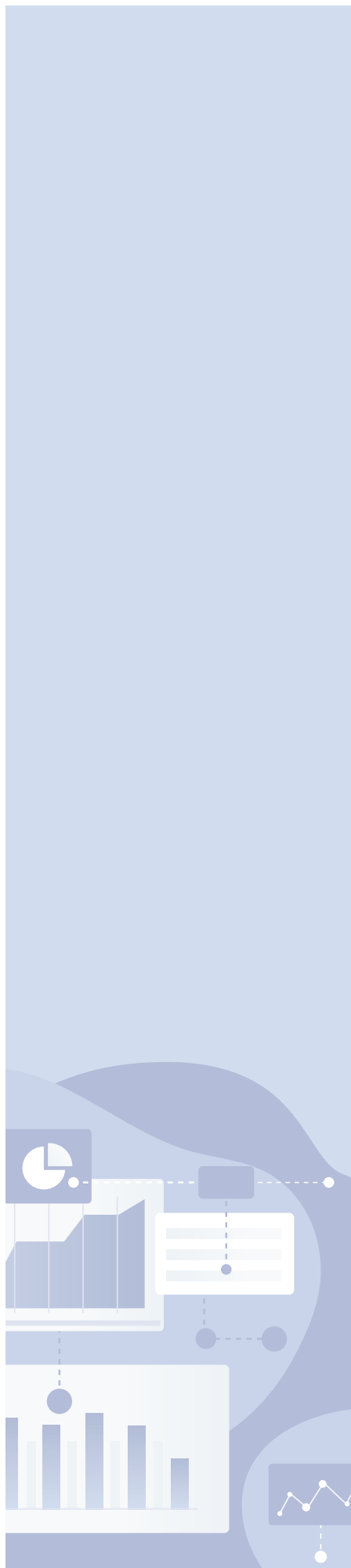
At the same time, the expert community in Central Asia has started to impact decision making and to demonstrate independent analytical potential in recent years. It is therefore critical to support think tanks in the region, to facilitate the free exchange of their views, and to encourage regional cooperation between analytical centers, networks, journalists, and decision makers.

The leadership of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting considers one of its primary tasks to be strengthening sustainable analytical potential in Central Asia. This is in addition to building regional cooperation on this issue.

CABAR.asia – an aggregator of online regional analytics – is one of the few platforms providing think tanks and experts in the region the opportunity to publish analytical work, including in the “policy brief” format. It is obviously a critical resource for decision makers and researchers and for the wide range of readers interested in economic development, socio-political processes, and in issues of regional cooperation, security, and foreign policy.

IWPR’s experience in developing analytical potential in Central Asia is unique. It has helped establish schools for young professionals in regional and journalistic analysis in addition to helping them practically apply the skills and knowledge they acquire. The CABAR.asia platform has been central in providing young analysts and journalists the opportunity to publish their own analyses in various thematic areas.

“The Central Asia Expert ReForum” – held on 28-29 November in Almaty – served to sum up the results of previous IWPR projects in developing Central Asian analytical capacity. It also provided an opportunity to discuss how cooperation among expert communities in the region might be strengthened. The ReForum was organized with the support of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry and British Embassy in Kyrgyzstan.





Experts representing state and independent think tanks in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan attended the event. There were also graduates of CABAR Asia's analytical school. The forum provided an opportunity for collaboration between well-known regional experts and novice analysts. This was important in terms of establishing communication between different generations of experts and analytical communities and for exchanging ideas and experiences.

Guests from foreign think tanks, including John McLeod, a senior Russia and CIS analyst for Oxford Analytica, and Temur Umarov, an expert from Russia and consultant with the Carnegie Moscow Center, also attended.

The authors used presentations and speeches by ReForum participants in preparing this publication in addition to utilizing recordings of general and thematic discussions and the available literature on think tank development. This report examines the role of Central Asian think tanks and their analysis and includes suggestions and developments taken from group discussions at the ReForum. It also looks at the impact of think tanks and expert groups on political processes in the region as a whole.



THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ANALYTICAL CENTERS IN THE REGION

The history of the think tank – in the modern understanding of this term – extends over 100 years. First emerging in the United States, analytical centers became important elements in democratic societies, coming to play significant roles – they were seen as objective sources of information – in shaping political decisions at international, national, and local levels. State-backed think tanks took shape in Central Asia after independence and are still in the process of forming and developing as key elements of established authority.

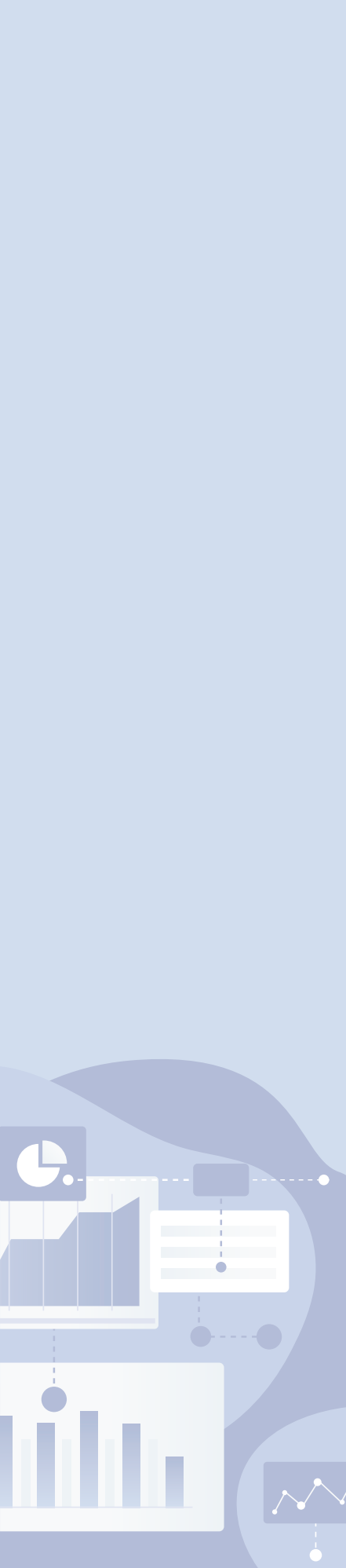
The “center” had made primary management decisions in the Soviet era and leaders in the new republics saw little need in creating an independent analytical infrastructure. The former Soviet states had to establish their own institutions with independence, though it took elites in the region a long time to understand the importance of fostering analytical potential in support of decision-making. They were also indifferent to developing institutions of scientific expertise.

With rare exceptions, Central Asian think tanks remain poorly represented in world rankings. There is a lack of recognition among the global expert community. The state-backed think tanks established after independence have encountered problems with institutional development, finance, and staffing, a result of their relative immaturity. They are still “young” as institutions.

State expert and analytical centers function in distinct ways in each of the five countries of the region, though their main task is to provide analytical support to the respective president, government, and other state bodies.

COUNTRY	SOME ANALYTICAL CENTERS IN CENTRAL ASIA	BRIEF INFORMATION
KAZAKHSTAN	Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies (КИСИ)	kisi.kz Created by a decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, N. Nazarbayev, on June 16, 1993; meant to provide analysis and anticipatory intelligence in support of Kazakhstan's foreign and domestic policy.
	Institute of World Economics and Politics (IWEP) at the Foundation of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan	iwep.kz Created under the auspices of the first President of Kazakhstan in 2003.
KYRGYZSTAN	National Institute of Strategic Studies (НИСИ)	nisi.kg Established by a decree of the Provisional Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, July 2010.
TAJIKISTAN	Center for Strategic Studies (ЦСИ) under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan	mts.tj Created in 2003 to replace the Institute of Economic Studies, which was under the Ministry of Economics of the Republic of Tajikistan.
UZBEKISTAN	Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ИСМИ)	isrs.uz Created in 1992 in accordance with a Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.
	Center for Economic Research	cer.uz Created in 1999 with the assistance of the government of Uzbekistan and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

Table 1. Some Analytical Centers in Central Asia



As a rule, state analytical centers examine strategic problems of foreign policy and provide comprehensive study of the economy, social and political processes, security issues, etc. They develop and offer analytical products, with these being dependent on the type of think tank and its specialization, the specifics of its customers and target audiences (including their requests), and ultimately on the center's organizational capabilities and the potential of its staff.

Types of analytical products:

- Brief analytical papers and essays, or “policy briefs,” containing expert assessments of specific problems together with recommended actions
- More detailed analytical pieces for decision-makers in the form of the “policy paper”
- Reports and summaries of study results with recommendations (at the request of customers)
- Presentations in public forums
- Online materials and articles
- Periodical analytical pieces such as yearbooks, annual reports, information and analytical bulletins, etc.
- Monographs
- Analytical articles in scientific journals

These centers may produce “open” or “closed” analytical products.

“Open” analytical products are accessible to the general reader. Their task is to formulate arguments and stimulate discussion on certain topics in addition to influencing decision-makers (DM), civil society, the media, and those who impact public opinion (opinion-makers). They are meant to have a broad educational impact. Think tanks use open venues to promote these products, publishing them in the public domain or disseminating their ideas and best practices at open conferences, seminars, and training programs.



Sherali Rizoyon

“Closed” analytical products are generally tailored to a narrower circle of customers or written at the order or request of state bodies, private corporations, political parties, and other private customers.

The quality and type of analysis is a very important aspect when supplying analytical products. Sherali Rizoyon, an expert from Tajikistan, rightly identifies frequent mismatches between decision maker needs and the formats and quality of certain analytical products. There are ongoing debates in Central Asia as to the best way to present information to decision makers as well as discussion about how much information to present. The continuing effort to find practical and realistic recommendations for decision makers is the only way to resolve this, according to most experts.



ANALYTICAL COMPLEXITIES AND CENTRAL ASIAN REALITIES

The effectiveness of any analytical center is indicated by the degree of its influence on high level decision-making processes. Central Asian analysts discussed this repeatedly at the ReForum. It was at the center of their conversations, with many expressing the opinion that government think tanks adhere to distinct political and ideological orientations given their official affiliation with the state.

“A RELEVANT QUESTION IS WHETHER STATE CENTERS ARE ABLE TO BE OBJECTIVE. IN TRYING TO CONVEY IMPARTIAL INFORMATION TO THOSE IN POWER, INCLUDING INFORMATION CRITICAL OF THE STATE APPARATUS, WILL EXPERTS ENDANGER OR COMPROMISE THEMSELVES?”

These questions are extremely relevant according to forum participants, though there are very rarely easy answers.

Another specific feature of think tanks in Central Asia is the distance separating political authorities from the expert community. It is difficult to implement recommendations and many only infrequently reach decision-makers. The analytical products that make their way to key decision makers are filtered at several stages, with a number of factors hinging on who, figuratively speaking, hands the file over to the decision maker.¹ Given their access, it is this individual who decides what information reaches key players and in what form. Is the person with the “folder” a government official, analyst, or public figure? The quality and content of the “reported” information depends on the answer to this question.

¹ Taken from a report delivered by Bulat Auelbaev, an expert from КИСИ, at the ReForum.



Temur Umarov, John MacLeod

Expert participation at the policy development stage does not necessarily mean that the expert community will impact final decisions. Those in power are the ones who make decisions and they are ultimately responsible for whatever decision is made. Experts only provide recommendations. This explains why decision-makers do not always listen to expert opinion and why they sometimes ignore the advice they hear.

The era of fake news and post-truths significantly complicates the function of think tanks in disseminating objective facts and reliable information to the public.² The importance of analytical centers is all the more critical in these conditions, both in terms of clarifying information and in conveying objective data to government agencies and society.

“THE ROLE OF ANALYTICAL CENTERS IN THE ERA OF FAKE NEWS AND POST-TRUTHS IS TO REFINE THE FLOW OF INFORMATION AND TO EXPLAIN TO STATE BODIES AND THE PUBLIC WHERE INFORMATION IS OBJECTIVE OR FALSE.”

TEMUR UMAROV

² Taken from a report delivered by Temur Umarov, a Carnegie Moscow Center Consultant, at the ReForum.

This situation is not limited to Central Asia. John MacLeod, a senior Russia and CIS analyst for Oxford Analytica, shared his experience with developing think tanks in Western countries. It used to be possible to refer to analytical centers as a “bridge” between the government and the public – this role was quite solid – but the situation is changing according to McLeod, who notes that “people are tired of experts.” This is unfolding in a context marked by a deepening split between political parties, and in a public space filled with opinions and lies that are passed off as facts.



ANALYTICAL CHALLENGES

A range of difficulties impact the quantity and quality of analytical products produced in Central Asia. This should be clear from what has been stated above. Expert and scientific communities in the region have to deal with these complexities, including a number of problem issues that directly affect their professional analysis and activities.

1 RESTRICTIONS RELATED TO POLITICAL CONTEXT

Expert and analytical communities experience difficulties with freely expressing opinions in all countries in the region, despite differences in the relative openness of political regimes and notwithstanding the development of democratic institutions and civil society. This is a problem that concerns state as well as independent think tanks.

State analytical centers depend on state funding and operate within the framework of whatever intellectual freedom is “permitted.” This is not a matter of choice. Forum participants noted that state affiliated centers must support the party line, with at least some of their activity – primarily comments to the mass media – legitimizing official foreign and domestic policies or the decisions of state leaders.

Even independent experts and thinktanks need to resort to self-censorship or adjust their results in these conditions of limited intellectual freedom, with whatever impact this might have on the quality of their analytical products.

2 THE PROBLEMS OF EXPERT SAFETY

This problem is related to the matter of political context. Participants repeatedly raised the issue of safety at the forum, noting that experts who express opinions critical of the government or its policies risk public ostracism or even prosecution.

The detention of K. Syroezhkin, who was charged with treason in 2019, is a vivid example of. An influential and authoritative Sinologist, Syroezhkin worked at the Kazakhstan





Nurgul Akimova

Institute of Strategic Studies and authored numerous works on cooperation between Central Asia and China. These events serve as a constant warning to the expert community on the need to self-censor and blunt criticism when publishing studies on sensitive topics for decision-makers and authorities.

3 ANEMIC INTERACTION BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC AND EXPERT COMMUNITIES

The involvement of the academic community with analytical centers is weak in almost all countries. There is very little cooperation. Forum participants defined this as a uniquely Central Asian problem. They noted that thinktanks in Western countries conduct research, enjoy academic freedom, and work closely with academic institutions, while pointing to the far weaker links connecting universities, research institutions, and analytical centers in Central Asia.

Bakhtiyor Alimjanov remarked on insufficient access to reliable information and statistics, claiming that an expert in Uzbekistan is “part scholar, part politician, and a good philosopher.” Alimjanov is an independent researcher from Tashkent. The development of science, and especially applied science, leaves much to be desired in Central Asia. Kahramon Bakozoda (Tajikistan) also notes a lack of reliable data and information for objective analysis, with particular emphasis on the inaccuracy of national statistics.

Nurgul Akimova, an independent economist from Kyrgyzstan, attributes the weak influence of analysts on decision-making to poor teamwork, stressing that experts in different fields rarely work together to solve complex problems. The efforts of one or two or three individual experts is not always enough for the desired results or outcomes, in her opinion.



4 THE CHALLENGES OF AN INFORMATION SOCIETY

Expert analysis is only one opinion among many in an information society, a context that makes everyone vulnerable to disinformation. Truth ceases to animate people and there are many claiming to be experts, including “talking heads,” television pundits, and even ordinary citizens. Those termed “expert” by the authorities, interest groups, or the media are supplanting professional experts. There are also those who position themselves as “authorities” without any real expertise.

Think tanks confront difficulties in maintaining their authority and influencing decision makers in these conditions. There is also the question of how to promote constructive political dialogue and democratic governance with quality analytics in an information society.

“HOW CAN THE ANALYTICAL COMMUNITY COUNTER POST-TRUTH POLITICS AND WHAT INSTRUMENTS SHOULD IT EMPLOY TO CONVEY OBJECTIVE FACTS TO DECISION-MAKERS?”

These and other issues require further discussion.



HOW TO ASSESS AND ACHIEVE IMPACT



Adil' Kaukenov

Influence is an important indicator of the effectiveness and quality of think tanks and their work. It is critical when ranking analytical centers to look at the criteria used for comparison and to determine leading institutes. The University of Pennsylvania has conducted this analysis on a global scale since 2006 as part of its “Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program” (TTCSP). There is nothing analogous to this survey in Central Asia and no comparable monitoring of think tanks in the region or of their impact on decision-making, at least to date. This topic was nevertheless central to discussions at the ReForum.

Existing think tanks and groups of experts participate in developing decisions, regulatory legal acts, and documents in the countries of the region. But it is difficult to verify influence even in cases in which expert opinion purportedly impacted decision-making. There are situations in which similar recommendations, as well as advice from different experts or groups of experts, cumulatively impact whatever decision is made. Expert influence on decision-making is only convincing if there is feedback between experts and decision makers, though such feedback is rare.

Experts and think tanks have limited access to key decision makers in Kazakhstan, for example. It is no secret that officials often have unrealistic expectations when it comes to analysts and analytical products: instead of anticipatory intelligence, analysis, and multiple points of view, they expect to see something analogous to “mystical revelation” in the work of experts.³

³ From a speech by Adil' Kaukenov, Director of the Center for Chinese Studies (Kazakhstan).

THE MATTER OF THE “ZONE OF RESPONSIBILITY”

The debate about “zones of responsibility” as it relates to decision makers and the expert community is central to understanding the role of think tanks and their ability to influence decision making. It is especially relevant to dispelling stereotypes about experts and their roles in the Central Asian context.

According to Rustam Burnashev, experts and decision makers have “zones of responsibility.” The task of analysts is to offer a distinct range of solutions in their area of expertise, while that of decision makers is to evaluate and reconcile different positions and make a decision.

“ANALYSTS DO NOT MAKE DECISIONS. THEY ARE NOT INVOLVED AT THAT LEVEL. AT BEST, THEY PARTICIPATE AT THE STAGE OF FRAMING OR ELABORATING DECISIONS. IF IT WERE OTHERWISE, THE QUESTION WOULD BE WHY DO WE NEED POLITICIANS? ANALYSTS OFFER A RANGE OF ADVICE IN THEIR AREA OF EXPERTISE, BUT IT IS THE DECISION MAKERS TASK TO COORDINATE ALL ADVICE AND CHOOSE A COURSE OF ACTION.”

RUSTAM BURNASHEV

E. Poletaev remarks that there are two cities in Kazakhstan – Almaty and Nursultan – distinguished by their high analytical potential, though he notes differences in quality of expertise, expert attitude, and work methods. Nursultan is a city defined by its “bureaucratic atmosphere” with experts interested in intra-elite relations and political alignments and possibilities. Poletaev attributes a more expansive view to Almaty, stressing that most regional experts work in the city. Denis Krivosheev holds similar opinions, believing that all important political decisions are made in the

capital, with Almaty suffering from “arrogance” as most information reaches it in the form of processed news. There is also the rare occurrence of news filtering down to Almaty through officials, at least for those who have access.

Kahramon Bakozoda, an expert from Tajikistan, rightly notes that officials rarely accept expert advice on issues not considered fundamental, while also preferring to forego expert opinion on matters deemed critical. The issue of expert access to decision-making is another point and no less important: expert recommendations filter into the middle layers of bureaucracy at best, with additional layers separating decision makers from whatever advice makes it through to this level.



Rustam Burnashev (on the right), Aydar Amrebaev

REDUCING THE DISTANCE BETWEEN EXPERTS AND ELITES

Edward Poletaev stresses the importance of proximity to the success of any expert – how close they are to the political elite, though there are many other factors that determine how successful experts are in working with decision makers, including professional competence, reputation, publications, visibility, the number of projects in which they have participated, etc. Poletaev remarks that the competitiveness of an expert is enhanced by cooperation with all public policy actors, including the media, NGOs, the business community, and social networks.

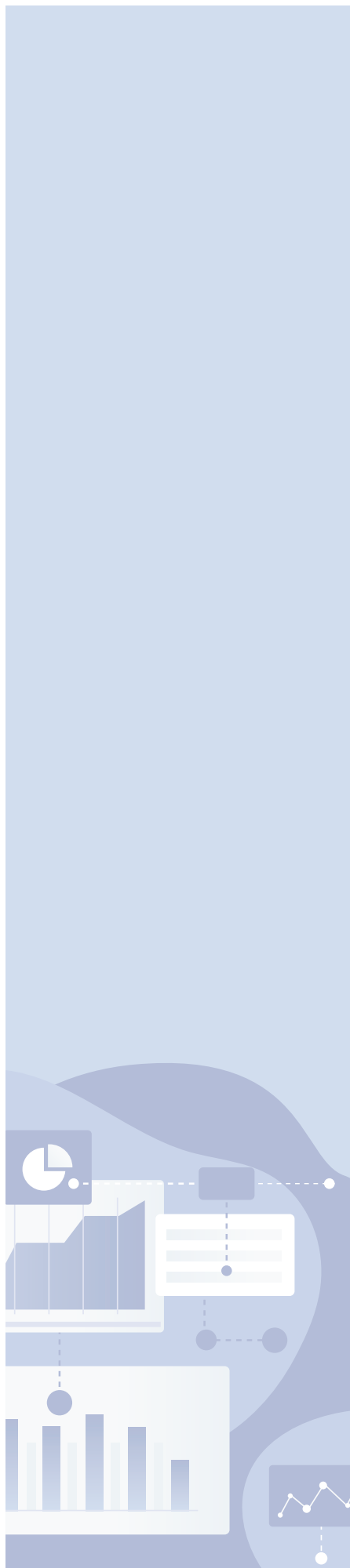
Exchanges between the expert community and decision makers come in waves in Kyrgyzstan. Windows of political opportunity open after each revolution, with beneficial effects on the openness of government agencies and with improvements in freedom of expression and democratic freedoms in general. Advisory committees form, authorities listen to the opinions of experts in developing national strategies and when reforming laws and policies in various sectors. This space of freedom inevitably decreases as “new” leaders consolidate political authority, however, as does the level of interaction between decision makers and the expert community. This is especially the case with independent think tanks.⁴

There was “a virtual soundproof wall separating government from society and the expert community” in Uzbekistan until 2017, though the interactions between civil society and the state have changed dramatically since then. Though most democratic institutions are still inoperative, public opinion and the positions of experts have started to impact government decisions. Online and social media are also exerting influence on decision making.⁵

The President of Uzbekistan defines the main directions of the country’s domestic and foreign policy. He has singular influence. No think tank can directly access the head of state, which significantly limits the possibilities for influencing decision-making. The structures of the public administration system have the opportunity to impact decisions

⁴ Taken from a speech by Kyrgyz independent analyst Anar Musabaeva.

⁵ Taken from a speech by Juliy Yusupov, an economist from Uzbekistan.



immediately, though they are directly subordinate to the head of state. The oldest state analytical center – the Institute for Strategic and Interregional Studies – operates “under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.” Having said all that, independent analytical centers in Uzbekistan have indirect opportunities to influence decision-making by participating in working groups on the development or amendment of regulatory legal acts. There is also the possibility to exert influence through joint events or the media, with the latter having become an increasingly significant factor thanks to the liberal changes made in recent years.⁶



Juliy Yusupov (on the left), Ermek Baisalov

⁶ Taken from a speech by Ildar Yakubov, an independent analyst from Uzbekistan.



Marat Mamadshoev

STATE STRUCTURES IN THE REGION: LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AND SYSTEMIC WEAKNESSES

Rustam Burnashev (Kazakhstan) links the anemic influence of analytical communities on decision making to the specific structural features of countries, attributing it to “weak states and societies.” Insufficiently effective institutions define weak “states” whereas the ability to resist the state or maintain a collective identity marks a society as “deficient.” In contexts with a weak state and society, decisions are almost always made behind closed doors and reflect narrow group interests – specifically the interests of whatever regime is in power – rather than broader state concerns.

There is also the question of decision makers’ bias towards independent think tanks, which is another key issue impacting demand for analytical expertise. Aidar Amrebaev asserts that decision makers do not trust independent experts, considering them to be uninformed when it comes to the internal processes, rules, and formats of their departments. Decision makers in government agencies prefer “inside” analyses, in other words, with the quality of such analysis clearly dependent on the professional potential of its staff. The quality of such in-house analysis is often low according to Aidar Sharibayev and Adil Kaukenov, two Kazakh experts, who attribute this deficiency to limited sources of reliable information and to the restricted range of expression allowed in state institutions.

IWPR’s editor in Tajikistan, Marat Mamadshoev, stresses that there are checks and balances and strong institutions in place to limit high officials in developed countries, while also noting the absence of anything analogous in Central Asia, a context lacking strong opposition parties and independent media and in which experts have no direct access to key decision makers.



“Decision-making is carried out behind the scenes and hidden from society and the expert community” in the autocratic systems of Central Asia. State paternalism, and the unwillingness of government agencies to accept points of view other than the “party line,” are additional systemic problems limiting decision maker, expert interactions.⁷

“AN EXPERT’S STANDING USED TO BE DETERMINED BY THE NUMBER OF HIS OR HER BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS. THIS IS NOT ALWAYS THE CASE ANYMORE. THESE CRITERIA STILL APPLY TO ACADEMIA, BUT AN ACADEMIC DEGREE IS NOT OF SIGNIFICANCE IN DETERMINING THE SUCCESS OF THOSE EXPERTS WORKING IN THE PUBLIC FIELD AND MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS ON PROBLEM SOLVING. THIS IS WHY THE MOST FAMOUS POLITICAL SCIENTISTS IN KAZAKHSTAN’S MEDIA ENVIRONMENT DO NOT HOLD DEGREES LIKE THE KANDIDAT OR DOCTOR NAUK.”

E. POLETAEV



⁷ Report by Aidar Amrebaev, a leading researcher at the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies, part of the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Education and Science (Kazakhstan).

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN TRANSLATING EXPERT OPINION



Azim Azimov, Lola Islamova

Broadcasting expert and public opinion, the media plays a dramatic role in decision-making processes in information societies, though CABAR.asia editor Ermek Baisalov notes this role is more ambiguous in Central Asia. There are numerous examples of journalistic investigations and media publications stimulating discussions at a high political level on sensitive issues and, in some cases, facilitating decision-making. At the same time, the media often sensationalize issues with little social significance, diverting public attention from serious matters.

Blogger and political consultant Azim Azimov remarked that media activity devolves at times into an absurd political show in Kyrgyzstan's turbulent political landscape. Media does not only refer to traditional media but also to social networks. The latter have acquired significant importance as indicators of the public mood in recent years. The Kyrgyz government, for example, broke off negotiations with a foreign company as a result of media pressure and due to reactions on social media and at protest rallies; the company was set to initiate geological explorations at uranium deposits in the Issyk-Kul region. Another interesting case was a joint investigation into corruption in Kyrgyz customs by Azzatyk radio, Kloop.kg, and the OCCRP international network. Published in November 2019, it provoked an unprecedented public response as well

as a series of peaceful protest rallies; the latter were organized under the banner “Reaction.” The “hype” factor also impacts and influences political decision-making processes, with decision makers at times disregarding reasonable arguments and questions of expediency.

The influence of the media on political processes is also evident in Uzbekistan, with a joint investigation of journalists in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan prompting the Uzbek government to allocate more funds for the purchase of insulin and to open more than 20 criminal prosecutions; the reporting had highlighted deficiencies in the provision of insulin for patients in the country. The situation in the media sector leaves much to be desired despite positive examples like these, with many journalists still feeling unsafe.⁸

In conclusion, users of various platforms in Central Asia act as “influencers” on various topics via online media, with authorities monitoring their work and even turning to them for assistance. That said, decision makers in Central Asian countries only take the views of experts and “influencers” into account when it benefits them or coincides with their current priorities or task.



⁸ Taken from a speech by Lola Islamova (Uzbekistan), a media expert and head of the Center for the Development of Modern Journalism.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON CHANGES AND RESULTS

IWPR considers it an important task to conduct various expert events to develop and generate specific recommendations for improvements. The expert groups at the ReForum proposed three categories of recommendations in the following areas: bettering regional cooperation between expert and analytical communities in Central Asia; improving the interactions of decision makers and analytical centers; and finding ways to promote analytical products more effectively.

The following measures are necessary to improve expert cooperation at the regional level:

1. Intensifying exchanges of experience between Central Asian analysts together with creating multilevel professional networks and fostering mutual support and solidarity;
2. Increasing cooperative research and providing joint recommendations and statements to decision makers on regionwide problems;
3. Work on collaborative regional publications;
4. Providing advanced training for analysts from the region and bringing in international experts, including under the auspices of the IWPR;
5. Establishing and or strengthening scholarly/scientific ties with non-CIS countries, including via use of the CABAR.asia platform and its existing, ready-made network;
6. Work with international organizations and experts;
7. Interacting with media in and outside of the region and ensuring publication of accessible materials; better access to internal and external electronic resources.

The following mechanisms and formats may improve interactions between decisions makers and expert communities:

1. Creating specialized expert councils – teams of specialists with distinct approaches and areas of expertise – to work on complex problems and strengthen the impact of the expert community and its influence on decision-making processes (“it is hard to manage things alone”);
2. Find and cooperate with “allies” in civil society – at the national or international level, especially on resonant issues;
3. Promote experts into power to strengthen reformist potential, though it is important to consider the risks in this regard (cooptation by the system or turning experts into “officials,” especially if they enter the executive branch);
4. Participate in projects specifically targeted to decision maker interests; this will allow experts to build their professional reputation by offering decision makers their analytical services;
5. Establish contacts with decision makers, donors, and partners.



Ildar Yakubov

It is important for stakeholders to pay attention to the following methods when promoting analytical products:

1. Maintain a personal blog or use mass media, open lectures, pages on social sites, as well as presentations via digital media or social networks to create a professional image through thematic publications;
2. Exchange views in online and offline forums on the most critical social and political problems in the region, taking into account successful examples of public reaction impacting or altering political decision making;
3. Closer interaction with all major actors in public policy, including the government, NGOs, community councils, the media, business community, etc., with the goal of promoting decisions meant to achieve and support public interests;
4. Participate in government events and maintain contacts with government officials.





Anar Musabaeva (on the left),
Jazgul Ibraimova



CONCLUSION

The market for analytical products and services is underdeveloped in all Central Asian countries, though the way decision makers consume these products and services is distinct in each Central Asian state.

We are focusing on decision maker demand for analytics, and in this regard, we can only conclude that the demand for the intellectual output of the expert community is either underdeveloped or completely absent.

The traditional political culture inherited by the states of Central Asia from the Soviet era explains this situation. This culture includes closed-door decision making and little familiarity with using intermediary structures like research centers and independent networks of expertise.

State officials are not always able to articulate their need for specific products clearly; they are also unwilling to pay for them. Independent experts prepare most studies on social and economic issues with funding from international donors. Decision makers, however, are often unable to use the available expertise and resources of non-governmental centers, which primarily function as non-profit organizations or NPOs. The current efforts of authorities in Kyrgyzstan to more strictly control NGOs may cost the government the intellectual support of independent experts and think tanks.⁹

Beyond this, decision makers tend to be open and more willing to interact with expert circles only in those areas that pose no threat to the political regime. The government of Kyrgyzstan, for example, shows interest in expert analysis on developing the economy or the social sphere, though no notable interest in analysis involving security matters or foreign policy.

Another issue related to the market for expert opinion is the range of products analytical centers offer.

The lack of demand on the part of decision makers for high-quality analysis impacts analytical products, as do issues of development in the analytical community itself. There is a link between anemic demand and weak products.

⁹ Taken from a report by independent analyst Anar Musabaeva.

PATERNALISM ON THE PART OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND THE REJECTION OF ANYTHING DEVIATING FROM THE “PARTY LINE” ARE CHRONIC PROBLEMS IN INTERACTIONS BETWEEN EXPERTS AND DECISION MAKERS. DECISION MAKERS WANT EXPERTS TO CONFIRM THEIR ASSUMPTIONS – THEY ONLY LISTEN TO WHAT THEY WANT TO HEAR – AND EXPERTS ARE ALL TOO EAGER TO FRAME THEIR ANALYSIS IN LINE WITH DECISION MAKER DEMAND. IT IS A GAME IN WHICH EVERYONE PRETENDS TO PLAY EVEN THOUGH THE OUTCOME IS DETERMINED IN ADVANCE, SOMETHING TERMED A “CONTRACTUAL MATCH” IN RUSSIAN. THE GAME AND THE AUDIENCE BOTH SUFFER AS A RESULT OF THIS.

AIDAR AMREBAEV

None of this contributes to developing the professional potential of the few existing analytical centers in Central Asia. It also important to stress that the expert community is not active in using public channels to distribute or promote its products via the mass media, digital platforms, or social media. The problems involved with providing analytical products is linked to the political context, which limits the intellectual freedom of the expert community and restricts their work to whatever framework is “permissible.”



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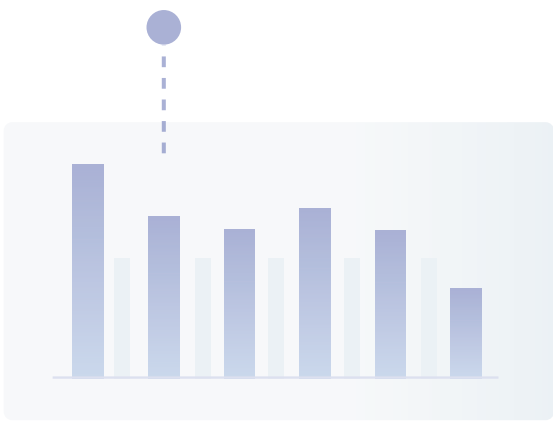
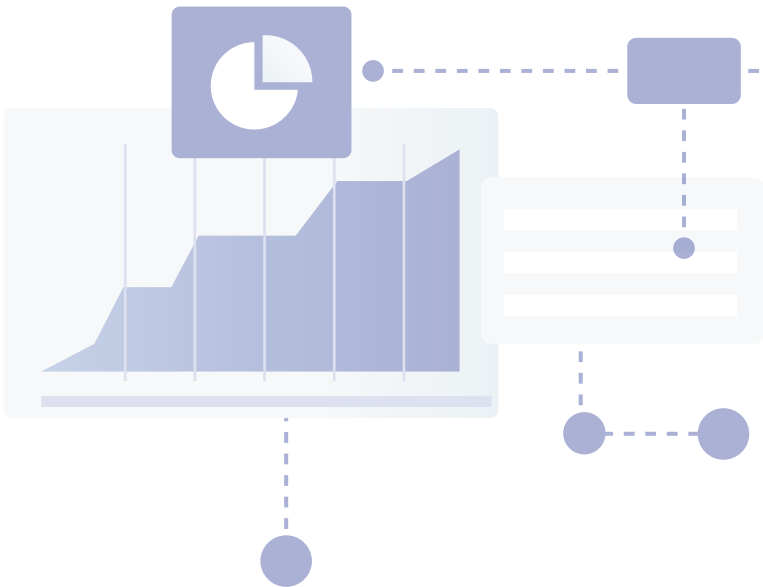
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