

LEADERSHIP IN KAZAKHSTAN: THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND ETHNICITY ON AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP ABILITY

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Introduction. A brief examination of the gender and ethnicity of leaders in sectors in Kazakhstan such as government, healthcare, education, and energy finds that most are male and ethnically Kazakh. This observation raised a question about whether this is a basic reflection of Kazakh society and beliefs about who should be a leader or who is a "good" leader, thus, this study was born. In this research project, conducted by students in the Communication Research Methods course (COMM 200, Spring 2014), we first examined what leadership characteristics are most important among Kazakhstani young people (RQ1). Then, we questioned whether the gender (RQ2) and/or ethnicity (RQ3) of person influenced that person's perceived leadership ability as judged by others in Kazakhstan.

Methodology. To answer these questions, we conducted an online survey. The link to the survey was sent via NU Email to all students, faculty, and staff and was available for respondents for 1 week. Responses were received from 339 people (Male: 139, Female: 200). Respondents were first asked to rate a list of characteristics in terms of their importance for leaders in today's Kazakhstan. Then, participants were presented with a resume and were asked to rate the person's leadership ability based on the same list of leadership characteristics. To examine if gender or ethnicity influenced perception of leadership characteristics, the name on the resume was randomly changed to a name that was clearly male Kazakh, male Russian, female Kazakh, or female Russian. Statistical t-tests were used to respond to the research questions.

Results and discussion. Respondents rated the following leadership characteristics as most important among 13 characteristics: Responsibility, Good Communication Skills, Confidence, Decisiveness, Takes Initiative, and Organized. Results of the t-tests indicated that neither gender nor ethnicity of the person on the resume influenced the perceived leadership ability attributed to that person. We hypothesized that there would be an influence of gender and ethnicity on a person's perceived leadership ability, but our hypothesis was not supported by the findings.

Conclusions. Our findings contribute toward a better understanding of leadership models within Kazakhstan. This initial study allows us to better understand the characteristics of leadership that are important for young people in this developing country. The results also show promising results in terms of low gender and ethnicity bias when other characteristics are held constant.

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