

People's views of the US's relations towards Cambodia: A survey among university students in Phnom Penh¹

SOTHIARY TOCH

School of Politics and International Studies
Central China Normal University (CCNU), China

TONG LY

Master of Education from Hiroshima University
Research Official at Royal Academy of Cambodia

Abstract

US's relations with other countries have generated public opinions influenced by its actions and policies. In Cambodia the US's influences have shaped Cambodian views among of which are university students. This study aims to explore Cambodian university student's views of the US's relations towards Cambodia in terms of trust and friendship. Survey method with 381 randomly selected university students in Phnom Penh was conducted. Chi-square tests with descriptive techniques were used to test the association between the student's views with two independent variables, educational level and gender. The study finds that education holds significant association with Cambodian university student's views of the US's relations towards Cambodia ($\chi^2(2, N = 381) = 23.282, p = 0.000$) while gender is irrelevant $\chi^2(2, N = 381) = 0.039, p = 0.981$. Proportionally, 36.2% favour the US as a reliable and trusted power while 23.1% disagree. Additionally, student's views of the US's engagement in development aids, economic aspects and the US's security credentials are found significant with their views of the US's relations to the Kingdom in terms of trust and friendship. The study concludes that postgraduate students, compared to their undergraduate counterparts, holds more critical views of the US's relations towards the country while additional

¹ **Note:** This research was conducted and written before the COVID-19 pandemics

knowledge and understanding on the US-Cambodia relations issues plays a vital role in shaping people's' opinion.

Keywords: Cambodian university students, public views and US's relations.

INTRODUCTION

The foreign public opinions on superpower's influence have become a continuum of study in international relations and politics. In the wake of the geopolitical competition between the US and rising China, there have been surveys of foreign public opinions on the US's influences in some countries and regions. According a recent survey by the Pew Research Centre, a growing share of people see US's foreign actions a danger to their countries (Gramlich & Devlin, February, 2019).

There are a lot of studies on the subject. However, the scholarly literature covering the topic has still been limited and rare to some extent. Some studies have not focused specifically on the views of the individual groups of people in a country whose relations with the US. As far as the US's relations with other countries have been concerned, the specific groups of people play an important role in shaping such relations as well as domestic policy making. Therefore, exploring the perceptions of these groups is noteworthy in those countries.

In Cambodia, the US's influences have been significant. On the one hand, the US's position is worth noting from both economic and political perspectives, particularly after the 1990s peace settlement. The US has not only been an important trading partner but also the second largest market for the Kingdom's garment exports. Moreover, it has provided approximately \$235 million in aids covering the development of good governance, democracy and civil society between 1993 and 2018 according to the data from USAID, foreign aid explorer and governance and civil society assistance.

On the other hand, the level of foreign relations between Cambodia and the US, in some circumstances, have been strained and is attributable to historical sentiment and more recently the disruptions of domestic politics as well as the former's tilt to China in a broader sense. The latter has always put some pressure on the former to restore political situation but the former's government has not only

called it domestic affair interference but also ever considered the actions politically motivated and against the will of people, and will just affect the bilateral relations between the two countries.

All of above have generated diverse views among Cambodian public, and has also created a legitimate question, that is, to what extent do Cambodian university students view the US's presence in the country? The main objective of the study is to explore the Cambodian university student's views of the US's relations towards Cambodia in terms of trust and friendship. Even though their opinions do not directly translate into the Cambodia policy with the US, it is certainly one of the factor for policy makers to consider when forging policy towards the US as they are the potential societal forces and the next leaders of the country. Furthermore, the growing influence of China over Cambodia is inevitable, economically and politically.

This study employs survey method to address the research objective and seeks to answer how Cambodian university students in Phnom Penh perceive the US's relations towards Cambodia with regard to educational level and gender. The discovered views are crucial for a better understanding of political dynamics in Cambodia, and will provide an insight for policy makers and fill the gap in scholarly literature on the topic of the America's global influence, particularly in a more specific case study in a foreign country.

The study finds that education level holds significant association with university student's views of the US's relations towards Cambodia ($\chi^2(2, N = 381) = 23.282, p = 0.000$) while gender is irrelevant ($\chi^2(2, N = 381) = 0.039, p = 0.981$). 36.2% favoured the US as a reliable and trusted power while 23.1% disagreed. Additionally, student's views to the US's engagement in development aids, economic aspects and the US's security credentials are found significant with their views of the US's relations to Cambodia in terms of trust and friendship. The postgraduate students, compared to their undergraduate counterparts, hold more critical views of the US's relations towards Cambodia while additional knowledge and understanding on the US-Cambodia relations issues plays a vital role in shaping people's' opinion.

Followed the introduction, the paper is structured into several parts. The first section discusses the contextualisation of the Cambodia-US relations briefly from the 1950s to the present. It helps the readers to get more understanding about relevant background of

the Cambodia-US relations issues. The next section is the conceptual framework demonstrating theoretical notions of the topics in the previous studies and how the study is designed. Then, the methodology explains on how the data collection is conducted. The following section is the results of the research followed by the discussions of the findings. The paper ultimately concludes with summary remarks and shows the limitation of the methodological design of the study.

CONTEXTUALISING US'S PRESENCE IN CAMBODIA

The contextualisation of the US's presence in Cambodia manifests actions in the lingering bilateral relations between the two countries. The formal relation traces back to the Prince Sihanouk's regime. In the year before the Second World War, Cambodia's presence was insignificant, however amid the Cold War, Cambodia had to cope with the anxiety induced by the confrontation of the superpowers, mainly the US and the Soviet Union. There was no American diplomatic presence in the country at that time, and representatives from the consulate in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh as present) sometimes travelled to Cambodia for just filing reports and administrative assignment. The US established diplomatic recognition of Cambodia in 1950 aimed to project its regional interests and to shield the Southeast Asian region from the communist faction (Clymer, 2013).

The relations were seen as trouble as Sihanouk was forced by the US to join the battle against the communism but he made an effort to keep his country out of the Cold War (Clymer, 2004). He had then decided to break diplomatic relations with the US in 1965, but later restored it in 1969, after which time the US conducted a four-year, sustained and large scale bombing campaign in Cambodia aimed at destroying the North Vietnamese troops based in the country (Lum, 2009).

In 1970, Sihanouk was ousted by a coup while he was on mission overseas for diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Lon Nol with his other associates then seized power (Chandler, 1991). It was believed that the coup was supported by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The proposed withdrawal of foreign arm forces from Cambodia by the Paris Agreement in January 1973 was not effective after the Vietnam War, as massive B-52 and F-111 bombings of Cambodia still continued despite the ceasefire (Birds, 2012). A rough

estimate of 50,000 to 150,000 people were killed by the US bombing of Cambodia between 1969 and 1973 (Kiernan, 1994).

As an ally and a client state of the US, the Khmer's Republic received financial supports from the US not only in economic terms but also in military projects. The Cambodian armed forces at that time were used to counter the communist Vietnamese troops (Omar, 2016) and were seen active in the American's anti-communist containment policy in Southeast Asian region (Chew, 2009). Later, Sihanouk had sought for shelter and reluctantly formed an alliance with the Khmer Rouge to fight the Khmer's Republic. This led to a civil war between the two groups in the country, culminating in the fall of the Khmer's Republic on 17 April 1975 (Lum, 2009). The genocidal regime of the Khmer Rouge took power and caused millions of Cambodian civilians died. It lasted until early 1979.

The collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime was replaced by the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), which was later changed to the State of Cambodia (SOC). The government was mainly supported by Vietnam whose the Soviet Union stayed behind. Despite conquering most parts of the country, it could not have nominal control over the whole Cambodia until the Khmer Rouge forces were driven out to the northwest provinces of Batambang, Siem Reap and Oddarmeanchey (Slocomb, 2003). However, the civil war with the Khmer Rouge forces still continued. The Khmer Rouge guerrilla allied with two smaller non-communist parties and then called themselves the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). They were diplomatically and financially supported by the US. The US and other nations did not recognize PRK, but maintained CGDK as the legitimate government until 1992, and they also provided logistical supports to CGDK (Kiernan, 1994).

The relations between the US and Cambodia had been gradually renormalized after the UN-sponsored 1993 election. The US's policy towards Cambodia focused on communism resistance, upholding the human rights and democratic governance (Lum, 2009). However, imperfect practices to promote human rights and democracy had been cited as a constant source of disagreement in the US-Cambodia relations. The domestic military clash between Cambodian People's Party's group led by Hun Sen and FUNCINPEC's royalist led by Prince Norodom Rannaridh in early July 1997 was an instance. The country once again suffered from international community sanctions.

The relations were later improved because of political stability in 2006 and US was interested in working with Cambodia to respond the spreading of terrorist resurgence and China's growing power in the region. But Cambodia's human rights record had been still a source of friction between Prime Minister Hun Sen and major providers of foreign aid. Foreign aids provided to the Kingdom was known to be roughly half of the country's government budget in that time. It is believed that the country's dependence on this assistance had helped to keep pressure on the government to maintain basic freedoms and democratic institutions.

During the Obama administration, the US had proactively engaged with Cambodia to seek more regional support for its 'rebalancing'. The US high-level officials including President Barack Obama, Secretary of States Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defence and First Lady Michelle Obama visited the Kingdom. In addition, the US government then involved Cambodian military through naval port visits, joint exercises and military assistance, making the relations improve.

However, in the light of power rivalry between the US and China, Cambodia was sometimes caught in a dilemma as it has been pushed to take sides, but simultaneously also benefited from its relations with China. In that regard, its relations with the US cooled due to the capriciousness of Cambodian political situation. Then crackdowns of the opposition groups and local media were case in point that led to frictions over the Cambodia-US relations before 2018 election.

Even though there have been ups and downs in Cambodia-US relations, the latter's presence has still been so significant to the Kingdom's development. On economic aspect, the US has been an important trading partner. For instance, the bilateral trade volume in 2017 was nearly \$3.46 billion, including \$3.06 billion in Cambodian goods exported to the United States. As the second largest market, the US accounts for 29% of Cambodian merchandise exports followed the EU's share of 43%. On top of that, Cambodian goods receive preferential or duty-free tariff treatment of the US Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) program making the exported goods more competitive in the market (Millar, 2016). On social and political sectors, the US has provided approximately \$235 million in aids related to good governance, democracy and civil society between 1993 and 2018. There

are also more technical assistance, training and human resource development provided to other sectors.

It has been obvious that the relations between Cambodia and the US have often been low and high. During the Cold War, the US tried to pull out Cambodia under its influence and forced it to join battleground to counter communist insurgencies in the region. However, the US interest to engage with Cambodia after the political reform in 1993 had changed. While the US provided much aid to Cambodia for socio-economic development in specific sectors such as education, health, human rights and democratic governance, etc. as mentioned above, the country has been the main foreign market for Cambodian garments and textiles. The US wanted to promote human rights and good governance as well as counter China's growing influence in Cambodia (Lum, 2009). The US's presence in Cambodia is still relatively significant to the socio, economic and political development.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The views of foreign public to the United States are developed based on the theoretical concept of the US's influence in global affair. They have been variably shaped by what the US has been doing at the places. A study into the public opinions surveying in 44 countries found a minority view of anti-Americanism (Pew Research Centre, December 2003). However, some cases tells different story. For instance, global opinions on the US's foreign policy actions and implementations were found diverse in other countries due to the percentage of Muslim in the state's populations and recent experience with terrorism (Goldsmith, Horiuchi & Inoguchi, 2005). This has showed that variant views on the US relations towards other countries hold some associations with contextual factors.

Some scholarly writings regarding anti-Americanism on Asia also become known. A study looked into why a great number of Indonesians view the US government as an aggressive and militaristic danger to the world. It stated that it was because of the association with the American war in Iraq and the failure of US policies to differentiate fundamentalism from terrorism (Farber, 2009). The other one on the Indonesian perceptions is the focus of Budianta's study (Budianta, 2009).

In China, Chinese respondents in a study perceive America as two faceted, ones at home which is largely positive and another negative ones at global stage (Hao and Su, 2007). The ones at home are called Cultural America and ones in the world are called Super America. The studies by Kim on anti-Americanism in Korea (Kim, 2002; Kim, 2003), Steinberg about the Korean attitudes towards the US (Steinberg, 2015) and Ross and Ross on the anti-Americanism in the East Asia (Ross and Ross, 2004) are the other milestone of the study topic. However, most studies focus on broader perspective of anti-Americanism in international system. They do not represent specific group of a society and are quite limited in the knowledge about how the United States is perceived (Carlson & Nelson, 2008).

The existing theory of the foreign views to the US have been elicited based on the constructs of variables that shape those views that discern in the US's global image and influence both domestically and internationally in the actual context. Such views encapsulate the nuance of the US's influence and presence in foreign countries; literally of what the US has been doing regarding its foreign policy and action. In Carlson & Nelson's study, they use some predictors (economic interest, trade dependence, cultural and political similarity) that could shape the opinions with different levels (individual, national and multi levels) to measure how they perceive the anti-Americanism.

However, this study is designed employing a questionnaire survey aiming to explore Cambodian university student's views of the US's relations towards Cambodia in term of trust and friendship. So, we develop the methodological design based on the context of the study and create the questionnaires that are consistent with the research questions and objectives.

The main dependent variable is 'the views of Cambodian university students. Independent variables attached to the situation of the university students are age, gender, education level and relevant course taken by students. Based on the existing theoretical concept, the study chooses 'education levels of the students as the main independent variables. The analysis of the explored views is linked to the US's influence in the kingdom, presumably in the domains of economic, trade, aid and security. We prefer to use the term 'presence' instead of 'influence' that ironically represents the US's persistence in Cambodia since the 1990s.

Here are the research questions:

- a. *How are the Cambodian university student's views of the US's relations towards Cambodia in regards with their educational level and gender?*
- b. *In what ways have Cambodian university student's views on the US's relations towards the country been shaped?*

Adding more insights to the conceptual framework grounded in how the US's universal values have been viewed domestically and globally based on constructed variables, the study further explores the foreign public views of the US's relations towards Cambodia, but focuses instead on a specific group of people who are the Cambodian university students in Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia.

Instead of employing the existing data and theoretical approach discernible in the previous studies, this study employs survey questionnaire specifically designed to address the research questions and objective. It is of an academic significance. The study not only broadens existing theoretical notions of the topic but also encourages ongoing debate over Cambodia-US relations literature as well as the US global influence or image in a larger extent in the international relations.

METHOD AND DATA

This research employed quantitative approach. It used survey questionnaire to collect data from 381 volunteer students undertaking their courses at six different universities in Phnom Penh. The participation in this study was entirely voluntary, that is, all respondents were randomly selected and well informed in advance about the study purpose and the nature of their free participation. The survey consists of 12 questions designed to capture students' views about the US's presence and its engagement with Cambodia. The first part of the questionnaire is about personal information including gender, age, education levels, and working status etc. The second part is designed with a 3-point Likert scale, and aims to explore the university student's perceptions of the US's relations towards Cambodia with the following statements.

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|---|--|
| 1 | Most investment in Cambodia belong to the US companies. |
| 2 | The US aids focus on governance, democracy and human rights. |
| 3 | The US has provided most aids to Cambodia after 1993. |
| 4 | The US has played an important role in regional security where the Cambodia locates. |
| 5 | The US is the most trusted friend of Cambodia in terms of foreign policy relations. |
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With the concern of its validity and reliability, the study piloted the questionnaire with a group of students at the University of Cambodia to check whether there would be any misinterpretation or confusing concepts in the arranged questions. With comments and suggestion from the pilot study, the questionnaire was edited and finalized for the main survey. In total, there were 500 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the undergraduate and postgraduate students studying in the target universities. There was a 76.2% response rate, which is equivalent to 381 copies of questionnaire. The data was analysed using SPSS Version 23.0 with descriptive statistical techniques and Chi-square inferential test to investigate the association of students' view about the US's relations towards Cambodia in terms of trust and friendship.

Among the respondents, 86.6% are between 16 and 25 while only 1.3% are older than 35. Majority of the students (52.5%) are females and 47.5% are males, among those, 85.0% are pursuing undergraduate degree, and 15.0% are doing postgraduate level. Unbalanced distribution in academic level of the respondents is due to the predominant enrolment ratio of undergraduate students compared to postgraduate ones in each selected university and the randomness of the participation.

RESULTS

This survey of the 381 Cambodian university students reveals that 36.2% of respondents held favourable view of the US as reliable and trusted power to Cambodia while 23.1% of them disagreed with the claim and the predominant remaining 40.7% expressed neither positive nor negative point of view.

Table 1: Respondents' perception about the US relations towards Cambodia

	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	23.1%	23.1%
No Idea	40.7%	63.8%
Agree	36.2%	100.0%
Total	100.0%	

Additionally, the finding revealed that 40.4% of undergraduate students supported the claim that the US is reliable and trusted friend of Cambodia while only 19.4% of them viewed opposite. In contrast, only 12.2% of postgraduate students considered reliable relationship with the US as nearly 44.0% said the reliable and trusted relationship with the US is impossible.

Table 2: Respondents' views about the US relations towards Cambodia in terms of trust and friendship with regards to education level

	Students' Perception			Total
	Disagree	No Idea	Agree	
Undergraduate	19.4%	40.2%	40.4%	100.0%
Postgraduate	43.9%	43.9%	12.2%	100.0%

The analysis showed that respondents' education had statistical association with their views of the US relations towards Cambodia ($\chi^2(2, N = 381) = 23.282, p = 0.000$). However, gender found itself statistically irrelevant $\chi^2(2, N = 381) = 0.039, p = 0.981$.

Moreover, the statistics suggested that the respondent's views of the US relations towards Cambodia were associated with their perceptions towards the US's presence in Cambodia manifesting in the domains of economic and trade, aids and regional US's security credentials. The following table presents the findings about the associations.

Table 3: The Chi-square tests proving the associations between respondent's views toward certain US's presence and their perceptions about the US relations towards Cambodia

	Sig.	Effect Size (Cramer's V)
Most investment in Cambodia belongs to the US companies.	.000	.194
The US aid focuses on governance, democracy and human rights.	.046	.113
The US has provided most aid to Cambodia after 1993.	.000	.271
The US has played an important role in regional security where the Cambodia locates.	.000	.360

The results from Table 3 reveal that respondents' views of the US relations towards Cambodia was associated with their views towards the US's engagement in economic and trade, development aids as well as the US's role in regional security matter. It suggests that the US's persistence in the Kingdom has been significant and greatly shaped to whichever views people hold.

DISCUSSION

The diplomatic relations between Cambodia and the US can be traced back to six decades ago. More or less, it has generated Cambodian views shaped by the latter's actions and policies, particularly after the Paris Peace Accord in 1991. The US has played an important role in Cambodia's development in both economic and political terms. So the US's presence in the kingdom would never been overlooked by the Cambodian citizens, especially the educated ones.

This survey finding, as presented in the result section, demonstrates that more respondents (36.2%) hold favorable views to the US as reliable and trusted power to Cambodia while 23.1% disagree with the claim and the predominant remaining 40.7% express neither positive nor negative point of view. The finding tends to contrast to the real situation in the Cambodia-US relations at political level. The relations between the two countries have always experienced ups and downs due to the constant frictions over human rights and democracy records in the kingdom (Lum, 2009) as well as the capriciousness of the former's domestic politics. Moreover, because of the historical lingering grudges, the former tends to view the latter as less t trusted and accountable. An illustration is witnessed during the Khmer's Republic

of Lon Nol in the 1990s (Owen & Kiernan, 2007). The alliance between the US and Khmer's Republic was established as a containment against the communism expansion in that time, but unfortunately the latter, in a critical time, was believed leaving the latter and let it be defeated by the communist resurgent.

In terms of education, the finding reveals that the distribution of respondent's views varied according to their academic levels. More than 40% of undergraduates supported the claim that the US is reliable and trusted power to Cambodia while roughly 20% expressed opposite. In contrast, only 12.2% of postgraduate students considered reliable relationship with the US as nearly 44.0% said the reliable and trusted relationship with the US is impossible. Statistically, the respondents' education is associated with their views on the US's relations towards Cambodia ($\chi^2(2, N = 381) = 23.282, p = 0.000$). The association provides that higher level of education the students hold more critical views towards the US's relations to Cambodia in terms of trust and friendship. This result corroborates with the study using the data of Asia Barometer Survey, which found that educational level plays significant role in shaping public opinion to the anti-Americanism in the East Asia. The higher level of education, the more critical view people hold to the US's influences and actions (Carlson & Nelson, 2008). However, gender finds itself insignificant in shaping the views ($\chi^2(2, N = 381) = 0.039, p = 0.981$).

Being grounded in the real situation, it can be explained that higher educated students are apparently embedded in Western values, possibly an underlying factor shaping the discovered views. Ironically, Cambodian university students have much praised such values. Despite Cambodian education quality being assessed as much lower compared to some countries, the student's feeling about Western values is inspiring. Most somehow embrace that Western education is standardized and best in quality even though they never experience it. So, their thoughts on the US in general would likely be inclined to more positivity and favourability irrespective of their knowledge and experience. Even though no single study has proven such assumption, most Cambodian university students perpetually praise Western education standard and wish to pursue their study in any Western countries, particularly the US, in their life time.

In addition, the statistical findings are even absorbing as there are associations between the respondent's views of the US's relations

towards Cambodia in terms of trust and friendship with their views on the US's presence manifesting actions and policies in development aids, security matter and investment.

Firstly, the finding from Table 4 reveals that majority (40.5%) of respondents disagreeing with the claim that the US aids focus on democracy, human rights and governance also express the same to the US's reliability and trust to the Kingdom. Moreover, 43.1% of respondents disagreeing the idea that the US has provided most aids to Cambodia also feel alike to the claim that the US relations towards Cambodia is trustworthy (Table 5). On the other hand, the cross-tabulation sees 40.1% of respondents accepting the actual roles and concentrations of the US's aids in the country also hold positive feeling of the US's relations towards Cambodia (see Table 4).

Table 4: Cross tabulation of respondents' perceptions about the US's presence in terms of US aids' main focuses and the US's relations towards Cambodia

		The US is the most trusted friend of Cambodia in terms of foreign policy relations.			Total
		Disagree	No Idea	Agree	
The US aids focus on governance, democracy and human rights.	Disagree	40.5%	35.1%	24.3%	100.0%
	No Idea	21.4%	46.4%	32.1%	100.0%
	Agree	21.1%	38.8%	40.1%	100.0%
	Total	23.1%	40.7%	36.2%	100.0%

Moreover, 52.5% of respondents supporting the claim that the US has provided most aids to Cambodia after 1993 also have the same opinion to the fact that the US is a reliable and trusted power to Cambodia (Table 5).

Table 5: Cross tabulation of respondents' perceptions about the US's presence in terms of US aids provided since 1993 and the US's relations towards Cambodia

		The US is the most trusted friend of Cambodia in terms of foreign policy relations.			Total
		Disagree	No Idea	Agree	
The US has provided most aids to Cambodia after 1993.	Disagree	43.1%	39.2%	17.6%	100.0%
	No Idea	13.0%	53.6%	33.3%	100.0%
	Agree	18.4%	29.1%	52.5%	100.0%
	Total	23.1%	40.7%	36.2%	100.0%

According to the analysis, aid provided by the US possibly plays a factor in shaping the respondents' views. The views would be possibly influenced by the aid provisions by the US after the Paris Peace Accord in both socio-economic and political development. This can be illustrated with the fact that the US has provided approximately \$235 million in aid related to good governance, democracy and civil society since the early 1990s. There are also more technical assistance, training and human resource development (Dosch, 2012, Ear, 2013; Lum, 2009). .

As far as the Cambodia's socio-economic development has been concerned, US's influence would never be overlooked. Some USAID-funded programs, particularly in democratic governance and human rights as well as in social sectors of health and education have been prominent and perpetually popular. To more or less extent, such programs, mainly implemented by some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), have been recorded in young Cambodian's head and heart by mean of mass media, filings and individual learnings, thereby persuading them to learn the facts about US's aid program in particular and its political agendas in general. This partly explains how the US sustains its global prominence through aid programs to developing countries. It perfectly reflects to an argument citing that the US not only retains more traditional hard power resources than any country but also has the soft power with ideological and institutional resources to keep its lead in the new domains of international order (Nye, 2004).

Secondly, given the influential role of the US's aids in shaping the respondent's views, the US's regional security credentials also finds itself parallel. Cross-tabulation in Table 6 validates it. The majority of respondents (53.3%) not supporting the claim that the US plays an important role in regional security architecture also feel suspicious of the US's reliability towards Cambodia. On the other hand, there are 60.6% of respondents accepting the claim also stand in favor of the US reliability and trust.

Table 6: Cross tabulation of respondents’ perceptions about the US’s presence in terms of US’s role in regional security and the US’s relations towards Cambodia

		The US is the most trusted friend of Cambodia in terms of foreign policy relations.			Total
		Disagree	No Idea	Agree	
The US plays an important role in ensuring regional security where the Cambodia locates.	Disagree	53.3%	25.6%	21.1%	100.0%
	No Idea	18.9%	55.5%	25.6%	100.0%
	Agree	7.1%	32.3%	60.6%	100.0%
	Total	23.1%	40.7%	36.2%	100.0%

The finding could possibly be supported by the actuality of the respondent’s experience. They might have exposed to the understanding of the US’s regional security credentials, bilateral relation between Cambodia and the US and China’s influential role through learning. In light of security, the US has always been a watchdog engaging in the East and West security architecture to project its national interests as a superpower (Beeson, 2009; Copeland, 2012; Marincowitz, 2014; Pant, 2012) and to craft policy aimed at limiting China’s growing assertiveness in the region (Omar, 2016). Concerning this, the respondents would have touched upon the issues, particularly by media. So, the plausibility that education level holds statistical significance in student’s view towards the US’s presence in Cambodia discussed above attests this finding.

Last but not least, the statistics also prove that respondents’ views about the US relations towards Cambodia is statistically associated with their opinions on the US’s investment in the country. The cross-tabulated data from Table 7 informs that 30.0% of respondents doubting the claim that most investment in Cambodia belongs to the US companies also feel suspicious of the US’s reliability and trust. On the other hand, there are 57.4% of respondents taking the claim also believe the US as reliable and trusted power.

Table 7: Cross tabulation of respondents’ perceptions about the US’s presence in terms of US’s investment and the US’s relations towards Cambodia

		The US is the most trusted friend of Cambodia in terms of foreign policy relations.			Total
		Disagree	No Idea	Agree	
Most investment in Cambodia belong to the US companies.	Disagree	30.0%	39.5%	30.5%	100.0%
	No Idea	12.6%	53.4%	34.0%	100.0%
	Agree	17.6%	25.0%	57.4%	100.0%
	Total	23.1%	40.7%	36.2%	100.0%

Given its association with the respondent’s views of the US relations towards Cambodia, the term ‘investment’ takes in a broad meaning in relation to economic and trade activities the US has played. More or less, the influences or interests have been substantial and are in minds and hearts of Cambodian people, particularly the educated ones. As far as Cambodia’s development is concerned, the economic interests Cambodia has received from the US after the peace settlement have been enormous (Dosch, 2012; Sato, Shiga, Kobayashi & Kondoh, 2011). The US has been an important trading partner to the Kingdom. The volume of bilateral trade in 2017 was nearly \$3.46 billion, and \$3.06 billion in Cambodian goods exported to the United States. As a second largest market, the US accounts for 29% of Cambodian merchandise exports close to the EU’s greatest share of 43%. On top of that, Cambodian goods receive preferential or duty-free tariff treatment of the US Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) program making the exported goods more competitive in the market (Godfrey, Sophal, Kato, Piseth, Dorina, Saravy,....& Sovannarith, 2002). All of above reflect the theory that explains that domestic public opinion is malleable and that economic interests can thus feed down to the individual actors via the influence of political elites and media (Golsmith et al., 2005).

CONCLUSION

To summarize, the research is designed to explore the Cambodian university student’s views of the US’s relations towards Cambodia in terms of trust and friendship in association with their education level

and gender. The study finds that education level holds significant association with Cambodian university student's views of the US's relations towards Cambodia ($\chi^2(2, N = 381) = 23.282, p = 0.000$) while gender finds itself irrelevant ($\chi^2(2, N = 381) = 0.039, p = 0.981$). Proportionally, 36.2% favour the US as a reliable and trusted power while 23.1% disagree. Additionally, Cambodian university student's views to the US's engagement in development aids, economic aspects and the US's security credentials are found statistically significant with their views of the US's relations to Cambodia in terms of trust and friendship.

This research adds more insights to the topic in regards with foreign views towards the US's influence in foreign countries in general as well as significantly contributes to the ongoing debates in the existing literature of the US-Cambodia relations. Given the results, education has been proven a vital role influencing individual's views towards the US's relations towards Cambodia. Majority of Cambodian university students surveyed at target universities in Phnom Penh hold favorable views of the US as reliable and trusted to Cambodia. It is evident that the postgraduate students, compared to their undergraduate counterparts, hold more critical views of the US's relations towards Cambodia in terms of trust and friendship. In addition, the US's engagement and presence in the Kingdom after peace settlement manifest essential action and policy in development aids, trade and investment as well as the its regional security credentials as a superpower appear the essential factors shaping Cambodian people's views. This study concludes that additional knowledge and understanding on the US-Cambodia relations issues plays a vital role in shaping people's' opinion on.

Due to the limitation and methodological approach, this research suggests that further scientific studies into the US's influences in Cambodia employing more social and economic models deserve to be considered. Any survey or study that incorporates a largely-represented number of university students is also appreciative as this study merely represents views of a small group centered at the universities in Phnom Penh. Moreover, as public participation has become matter in policy reformulation, people's views on relevant social issues should be taken into account in policy decision making.

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