

Communicating about Peace and Peacebuilding

Research Methods and Sample Composition

This supplement provides detailed information on the research that informs FrameWorks' strategic brief on peace and peacebuilding. Below, we outline the research conducted for the project, describing both methods used and sample composition. This research provides the evidence base for the recommendations in the strategic brief.

The Untranslated Field Story of Peace and Peacebuilding

To develop an effective strategy for communicating about an issue, it's necessary to identify a set of key ideas to get across. For this project, these ideas were garnered from members of the peacebuilding field. To explore field knowledge about peace and peacebuilding, FrameWorks researchers conducted 14 one-hour interviews with members of the field who have deep knowledge of or experience with peacebuilding. Interviews were conducted between April and May 2019 and, with participants' permission, were recorded and transcribed for analysis. FrameWorks compiled the list of interviewees in collaboration with PartnersGlobal, the Alliance for Peacebuilding, and Humanity United. To refine the field story, FrameWorks conducted three group feedback sessions with members of the field.

Field interviews consisted of a series of probing questions designed to capture understandings about what peace and peacebuilding are, how peace is built, and the effects of peacebuilding. The latter part of the interview included questions that focused on the United States' role in peacebuilding, including barriers to US engagement in peacebuilding and what it would mean for the US to better support peacebuilding efforts. In each interview, the researcher conducting the interview used a series of prompts and hypothetical scenarios to challenge interviewees to explain their knowledge, experience, and perspective; break down complicated relationships;



and simplify complex concepts. Interviews were semi-structured in the sense that, in addition to pre-set questions, FrameWorks researchers repeatedly asked for elaboration and clarification and encouraged members of the field to expand on concepts they identified as particularly important.

Analysis employed a basic grounded theory approach.¹ A FrameWorks researcher identified and inductively categorized common themes that emerged in each interview and across the sample. This procedure resulted in a refined set of themes.

A draft of the untranslated story, which distilled key ideas from the members of the field interviewed, was shared and discussed in the three feedback sessions. These sessions included a mix of people who had already been interviewed and members of the field who were new to the process, who were identified in collaboration with project partners. Based on these sessions, FrameWorks researchers refined and finalized the untranslated story.

Public Understandings of Peace and Peacebuilding

A primary goal of this research was to capture the various commonly held assumptions, or cultural models, that members of the public use to make sense of peace, peacebuilding, and related issues. Cultural models are cognitive shortcuts to understanding: ways of interpreting, organizing, and making meaning of the world around us that are shaped through years of experience and expectations, and by the beliefs and values embedded in our culture.² These are ways of thinking that are available to all members of a culture, although different models may be activated at different times. Individuals belong to multiple cultures, each of which include multiple models (e.g., there are public cultures at multiple levels, including national and subgroup cultures, as well as professional cultures that people in particular fields participate in). In this project, our goal was to explore the models available in American public culture, but it is important to acknowledge that individuals also have access to other models from other cultures in which they participate.

In exploring cultural models, we are looking to identify *how* people think, rather than *what* they think. Cultural models findings thus differ from public opinion research, which documents people's surface-level responses to questions. By understanding the deep, often tacit assumptions that structure how people think about peace and peacebuilding, we are able to understand the obstacles that prevent people from accessing the field perspective described in the untranslated story. We are also able to identify opportunities that communicators can take advantage of—existing ways of thinking that can help people arrive at a fuller understanding of the issue.

To identify the cultural models that members of the public use to think about issues related to peace and peacebuilding, FrameWorks researchers conducted a set of interviews with members of the public. FrameWorks conducted 20 in-person, in-depth interviews in Catonsville, MD; Chicago, IL; and Kansas City, MO, in February 2020. These locations were chosen for regional variation as well as to enable variation along key demographic factors (see below).

Cultural models interviews are one-on-one, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately two hours. These interviews are designed to allow researchers to capture broad sets of assumptions, or cultural models, that participants use to make sense of a concept or topic area—in this case, issues related to peace and peacebuilding. Interviews consisted of a series of open-ended questions covering participants’ thinking about peace and conflict in broad terms, before focusing more specifically on their thoughts about peace, conflict, and peacebuilding in the context of foreign policy. The interviews touched on what peace and conflict *are*, what causes peace and conflict, how to advance peace, how people think about peace and conflict in a global context, what does and should shape US foreign policy, the role of the military, and how peace might be advanced through foreign policy. To account for ordering effects, half of the interviews began with questions about peace, and half with questions about conflict. Researchers approached each interview with a common set of topics to cover but allowed participants to determine the direction and nature of the discussion. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with participants’ written consent.

All participants were recruited by a professional marketing firm and selected to represent variation along several dimensions, which were identified in consultation with project partners. This included age, gender, race and ethnicity, educational background, residential location, political views (as self-reported during the screening process), military experience, and family situation (e.g., married or single; with or without children currently in school; and age of children currently in school).

The sample of members of the public included 10 women and 10 men. Of the 20 participants, 10 self-identified as “White or Caucasian,” six as “Black or African American,” three as “Hispanic or Latino,” and one as “Asian.” Four participants described their political views as “liberal,” three as “conservative,” and thirteen as “middle of the road.” Twelve participants reported living in a suburban area, and eight in an urban area. The mean age of the sample was 44 years old, with an age range of 22 to 67. Three participants had a high school degree or less; eight had completed some college or held a two-year degree; six held a four-year college degree; and three had graduate degrees. Five participants had previously served in the military, one participant was in active service, and fourteen participants had never served in the military. Fourteen participants were married or lived with partners. Twelve participants were parents.

To analyze the interviews, researchers used analytical techniques from cognitive and linguistic anthropology to examine how participants understood issues related to peace, conflict, and peacebuilding.³ First, researchers identified common ways of talking across the sample to reveal assumptions, relationships, logical steps, and connections that were commonly made but taken for granted throughout an individual’s talk and across the set of interviews. In short, the analysis involved discerning patterns in both what participants said (i.e., how they related, explained, and understood things) and what they did not say (i.e., assumptions and implied relationships). In many cases, analysis revealed conflicting models that people brought to bear on the same issue. In such cases, one conflicting way of understanding was typically found to be dominant over the other, in that it more consistently and deeply shaped participants’ thinking (in other words, participants generally drew on this model with greater frequency and relied more heavily on this model in arriving at conclusions). To ensure consistency,

researchers met after an initial round of coding and analysis, comparing and processing initial findings. Researchers then went back to transcripts to revisit differences and explore questions that arose through this comparison, and then came back together and arrived at a synthesized set of findings.

Analysis was centered on ways of understanding that were shared across participants. Cultural models research is designed to identify common ways of thinking that can be identified across a sample. It is not designed to identify differences in the understandings of various demographic, ideological, or regional groups, which would be an inappropriate use of the method and its sampling frame. While there is no hard-and-fast rule or percentage used to identify what counts as “shared,” models reported are typically found in the large majority of interviews. Models found in a smaller percentage of interviews are only reported if there is a clear reason why these models would only appear in a limited set of interviews (e.g., a particular issue was only probed about in some interviews but whenever it was discussed the model arose in participants’ talk).

Endnotes

1. Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research (observations)*. Chicago: Aldine; Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
2. Shore, B. (1998). *Culture in mind: Cognition, culture, and the problem of meaning*. Oxford University Press.
3. Quinn, N. (Ed.) (2005). *Finding culture in talk: A collection of methods*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

About FrameWorks

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