

Transnational Propaganda and Ethnic Polarization: Experimental Evidence from Malaysia

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Abstract

Authoritarian regimes increasingly engage in transnational information campaigns to expand their political and cultural influence beyond national borders. We argue that such operations can exacerbate ethnic polarization in target countries, specifically between diaspora communities and ethnic majority populations. Drawing on Social Identity Theory, we theorize that transnational propaganda exacerbates affective polarization by reducing intergroup social and political tolerance, while also increasing polarization in foreign policy preferences in racially diverse settings. To test these expectations, we conduct a preregistered survey experiment in Malaysia and examine whether China's transnational propaganda affects intergroup and foreign policy attitudes among ethnic Chinese and Malays. The results show that China's propaganda decreases Malays' social tolerance toward Chinese Malaysians while strengthening Chinese Malaysians' – but not Malays' – agreement with China's foreign policy positions in the region. These findings highlight how transnational propaganda can undermine social cohesion and create divergent policy preferences within multicultural societies.

Keywords: transnational authoritarianism, ethnic polarization, diaspora politics, Malaysia, China

Authoritarian regimes devote substantial resources to shape their international reputation, promote their cultures, propagate their economic models and political systems, and suppress dissenting voices abroad (Dukalskis 2021). Notably, transnational authoritarian propaganda has become increasingly effective in recent years, often outcompeting its democratic counterparts in winning hearts and minds around the world (Mattingly et al. 2024), thus contributing to a wider global resurgence of authoritarianism (Cooley and Dukalskis 2025).

Some transnational authoritarian propaganda campaigns involve overt attempts to influence domestic politics in target countries. Existing research has shown that Russian information operations, such as those during the 2016 US presidential election and in Ukraine, can incite public discord (Golovchenko et al. 2020; Golovchenko 2022). Other campaigns explicitly target diaspora communities by sowing distrust between them and other groups in the host country. For example, China has deployed transnational propaganda targeting Chinese Americans, seeking to drive a wedge between them and other Americans by spreading narratives about racial discrimination in the US and highlighting failures of American democracy (Chester and Wong 2025).

However, most transnational authoritarian propaganda is not overtly hostile. As Mattingly et al. (2024) demonstrate, much of China's external messaging focuses on promoting its political and economic models, as well as its policy positions. Do these softer propaganda approaches, which advertise authoritarian models and promote autocracies' policy positions without discrediting democracies, have similar polarizing effects on domestic politics in target countries?

We argue that transnational authoritarian propaganda can have polarizing effects on recipient countries, even when sowing discord is not its primary intention. This is because the world's two major authoritarian powers, Russia and China, have substantial diaspora populations beyond their borders. Ethnic Russians constitute a significant portion of the population in several post-communist democracies, while ethnic Chinese form a majority in Singapore and a substantial minority in countries such as Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Several of these countries experience ethnic tensions involving Russian or Chinese diaspora communities and other groups. Propaganda that is intended to promote authoritarian regimes' culture, institu-

tions, and policies can interact with underlying ethnic tension in recipient countries, ultimately contributing to a greater level of polarization both affectively and in terms of policy preferences.

Specifically, we build on Social Identity Theory (SIT) and theorize that diaspora communities sharing ethnic lineage with the dominant ethnic group in the authoritarian regime are more likely to resonate with its transnational propaganda. According to SIT, individuals derive part of their self-concept from group memberships, leading them to favor ingroup members and exhibit bias against outgroups (Tajfel et al. 1979). In the context of transnational propaganda, messages that appeal to the domestic population, such as evoking national pride or collective historical memory (Mattingly and Yao 2022), are also likely to be effective among diaspora communities. For instance, China’s transnational propaganda frequently invokes memories of historical victimization by colonial powers – the “century of humiliation” – alongside narratives of the country’s economic and political achievements in the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Such rhetoric not only promotes the “China model” but, more importantly, reinforces a shared Chinese identity while aligning diaspora sentiments with Beijing’s agenda (Yan and Li 2023).

Such narratives have important implications for intergroup relations between ethnic majorities and diaspora communities in target countries. In particular, it is likely to polarize the public in recipient democracies, both affectively and in terms of policy preferences, along ethnic lines.

First, our expectation regarding affective polarization – namely, that exposure to authoritarian propaganda reduces intergroup tolerance and heightens perceptions of outgroup political threat – follows directly from SIT’s core logic. Among diaspora communities, who are often ethnic minorities in their host countries, authoritarian propaganda increases the salience of ethnic identity over national identity. As a result, exposure to such messaging is likely to decrease diaspora members’ tolerance toward the ethnic majority and heighten their perceptions of political threat from the dominant group. Conversely, among non-coethnics (typically members of the majority population), ethnic appeals in authoritarian propaganda may reduce tolerance toward diaspora communities, who may be perceived as foreign-aligned threats to national cohesion. For example, Beijing’s information campaigns have placed many ethnic Chinese in Australia, Canada,

and the United States in a perceived contest of loyalties, with increasing reports of these individuals experiencing discrimination or physical threats due to their ethnic background. In short, authoritarian propaganda diminishes outgroup tolerance on both sides: for diaspora individuals, by reinforcing awareness of discrimination; and for majority group members, by heightening suspicion of diaspora communities' allegiances.

Second, transnational propaganda will also lead to ideological polarization, particularly in the realm of foreign policy preferences. Specifically, ethnic appeals in authoritarian propaganda should strengthen coethnic sympathies among diaspora populations, thereby increasing their support for the regime's global policy agenda. Conversely, this ethnically-targeted communication should have minimal impact on foreign policy support among non-coethnic communities, as such appeals do not invoke shared identity with these groups. Indeed, this outreach could potentially generate backlash effects among non-coethnics, who may view the regime's influence efforts as foreign interference or manipulation of domestic politics (Tomz and Weeks 2020).

To test our theoretical expectations, we examine the transnational effects of Chinese propaganda, one of the most sophisticated authoritarian information operations in the world (Dukalskis 2021; Mattingly et al. 2024). We conducted a preregistered survey experiment in Malaysia, a country with a substantial ethnic Chinese diaspora. Respondents were randomly assigned to watch propaganda content produced by China Global Television Network (CGTN), a state-sponsored broadcaster targeting international audiences. The content emphasized China's policy stance on Taiwan while also highlighting a shared Chinese identity. Importantly, the propaganda used in our study is not an explicit attempt to interfere in Malaysia's domestic politics; rather, it seeks to promote China's foreign policy agenda, thus making it a harder case for identifying the polarizing effects of transnational propaganda compared to instances of direct political interference. Following exposure to the treatment, we measured affective polarization between ethnic Chinese and Malay respondents by assessing outgroup social and political tolerance. We also measured polarization in foreign policy preferences by gauging respondents' support for Beijing's foreign policy agenda in Southeast Asia and toward Taiwan.

Our experimental findings provide nuanced support for our theoretical expectations. In contrast to previous studies that document significant overall persuasive effects of Chinese propaganda (Mattingly et al. 2024), we find no statistically significant effects at the aggregate level. Instead, we observe that exposure to Chinese propaganda produced heterogeneous treatment effects along ethnic lines. Regarding intergroup relations, Chinese media exposure decreased outgroup social tolerance among ethnic Malays. This suggests that China's transnational propaganda can indeed strain intergroup relations within host societies. Regarding policy preferences, and partially consistent with our expectations of ideological polarization, the treatment increased support for Chinese assertiveness in the region among Chinese Malaysians but had no comparable effect among Malay respondents. Taken together, these patterns suggest that China's transnational propaganda can produce two key polarizing outcomes: reduced social cohesion between ethnic groups and divergent ethnic responses to China's international behavior. We elaborate on the contributions of these findings in the conclusion section.

Experimental Design

We conducted our preregistered survey experiment in Malaysia between December 18, 2024, and January 27, 2025.¹ In total, we recruited 1,000 respondents, equally divided between ethnic Chinese and Malays.² The survey was administered online in three language options: English, Malay, and Chinese. After answering pre-treatment demographic questions,³ participants were randomly assigned to either a treatment group that watched a CGTN video or a blank control group. Table OA3.4 in the Online Appendix (OA) shows that treatment assignment was evenly balanced across all measured covariates.

For the treatment, we selected a video from CGTN's English-language content that was accessible to both ethnic groups. This selection reflects how overseas audiences, especially non-

¹The anonymized pre-analysis plan is available at: <https://aspredicted.org/cwvj-zkyq.pdf>

²Based on an a priori power analysis ($p = 0.05$, power = 0.8), we determined that a minimum of 393 participants per condition was needed to detect meaningful treatment effects (Figure OA3.1).

³Section OA2 provides a detailed description and summary statistics used in this study.

Chinese participants, would naturally encounter such content in Malaysia and helps mitigate potential language effects, thus ensuring that any observed changes could be attributed to the video's content rather than its linguistic medium (Pérez and Tavits 2019). The video also included English, Malay, and Chinese subtitles to ensure comprehension across all treated respondents.

The treatment consisted of a 2-minute and 40-second video segment advocating for China's "peaceful" reunification with Taiwan under the "One China" principle.⁴ It features speakers emphasizing the need to 'awaken Taiwan people's Chinese identity and urging "Chinese people around the world to unite together in supporting Beijing's reunification goals." This messaging explicitly promotes China's policy stance toward Taiwan, a typical pro-regime propaganda. It also appeals to a sense of shared ethnic identity among the global Chinese diaspora by framing the Taiwan issue as a Chinese matter. Comprehension was high in the treatment condition, with 80% of treated respondents correctly answering the manipulation check question after the video.⁵

Following the video treatment, we assessed participants' attitudes on three sets of outcome variables to capture both affective polarization and polarization in policy preferences along ethnic lines (see Table OA2.1 for question wordings). For affective polarization, we focused on two dimensions: outgroup social tolerance and perceived outgroup political threat. Social tolerance was assessed through participants' willingness to engage with outgroup members in everyday settings, using measures such as feeling thermometers, comfort with outgroup neighbors, and interpersonal trust. Political threat was measured by asking whether participants believed the outgroup holds excessive political influence, enjoys unfair representation in government, or actively undermines the respondent's ingroup. For policy preference polarization, we measured participants' views on China's foreign policy and global image. We selected two specific geopolitical issues where China's territorial claims are contentious, Taiwan and the South China Sea, as well as one general question about preferred global leadership between China and the US.

We constructed composite indices using factor analysis for each of the three outcome clus-

⁴Respondents were required to watch the entire video without skipping. See Section OA3 for the full transcript.

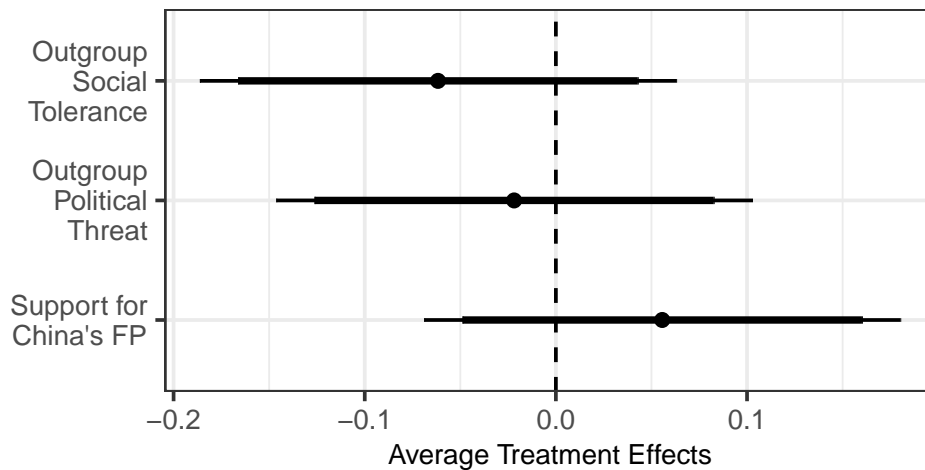
⁵The manipulation check question offered five answer choices, making the 80% accuracy rate substantially higher than the 20% expected from random guessing alone. Control group respondents also watched the video at the end of the survey and showed a similar comprehension rate.

ters: (1) *Outgroup Social Tolerance*, (2) *Outgroup Political Threat*, and (3) *Support for China's Foreign Policy*. Given that several items were measured using different scales, we standardized the constituent items within each outcome cluster before conducting factor analysis. The internal consistency of these measures was reasonable, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.66 to 0.73. All composite measures were standardized.

Empirical Findings

Figure 1 presents the average treatment effects (ATE) of China's transnational propaganda on our three composite outcome measures across all respondents. If our hypothesis regarding affective polarization holds, we should observe that the treatment decreases outgroup social tolerance (negative ATE) and increases perceived outgroup political threat (positive ATE). In contrast, our hypothesis concerning policy preference polarization does not predict a directional pattern for the overall ATE on foreign policy support, as we expect responses to vary by ethnic group.

Figure 1: Overall Treatment Effects on Intergroup Tolerance and Policy Preferences



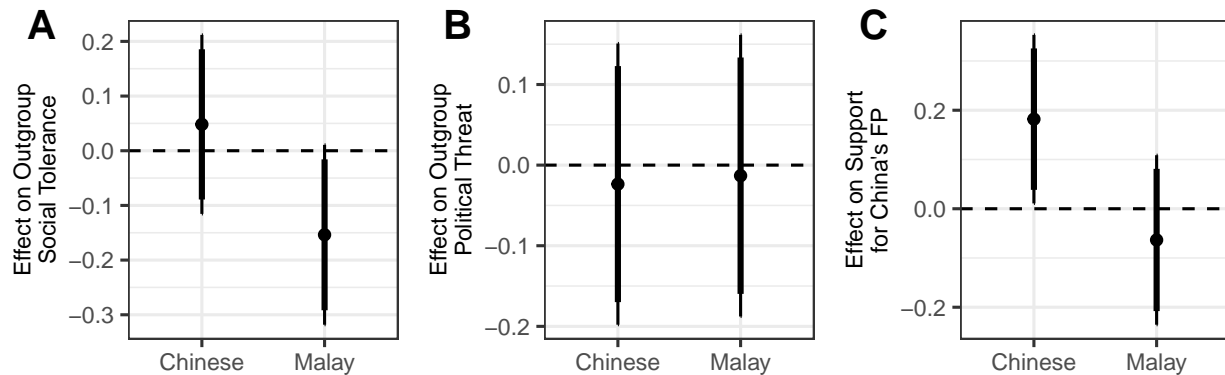
Notes: Plot shows the average treatment effects with 90% confidence intervals (thick bars) and 95% confidence intervals (thin bars). Full regression results are presented in Table OA4.5.

The results reveal no statistically significant effects on social tolerance or perceived outgroup political threat. Therefore, China's transnational propaganda does not increase affective polarization across the full sample. However, as we discuss below, this null result may mask important

subgroup differences. In contrast, the null result for foreign policy preference suggests that Chinese propaganda may not be as effective in winning hearts and minds abroad as some recent research implies (Mattingly et al. 2024). These findings point to the need for a more nuanced analysis that accounts for ethnic identity in shaping responses to authoritarian influence efforts.

To more directly test our theoretical expectation that transnational propaganda may resonate differently along ethnic lines, we examine conditional treatment effects by interacting respondents' treatment status with their ethnic identity. Figure 2 presents the estimated treatment effects on all three outcome variables, disaggregated by ethnicity.

Figure 2: **Conditional Treatment Effects of China's Transnational Propaganda on Inter-group Tolerance and Policy Preference By Ethnicity in Malaysia**



Notes: Plots show the conditional treatment effects by ethnicity with 90% and 95% confidence intervals. Table OA4.10 reports the full regression results.

Two striking patterns emerge when analyzing the results by ethnicity. First, the effect of authoritarian propaganda on *Outgroup Social Tolerance* appears substantially more pronounced among Malays, with an average decrease of 0.15 SD that is significant at the 10% level ($p = 0.067$). Further analyses reveal that this decrease is largely driven by reduced interpersonal trust among treated Malay participants (Figure OA4.2). Specifically, China's propaganda significantly lowers Malay's trust toward Chinese Malaysians, with a 0.22 SD decrease ($p = 0.009$). This is consistent with our expectation that authoritarian propaganda may provoke suspicions about the foreign allegiances of ethnic Chinese populations and undermine their perceived loyalty among the native Malay population. In contrast, exposure to Chinese state media has no significant impact on

intergroup perceptions among Chinese Malaysians. Overall, the findings provide partial empirical support for our first expectation: rather than impacting intergroup tolerance across all ethnic groups, the intergroup effects of authoritarian propaganda appear to be limited to the majority group and only within the social dimension.

The second noteworthy observation concerns the impact of transnational propaganda on foreign policy attitudes. As shown in Panel C of Figure 2, exposure to Chinese state media induced a 0.18 SD increase ($p = 0.037$) in Chinese Malaysians' perceptions of China's global standing and support for China's assertiveness in the region. These effects are primarily driven by two specific items (Figure OA4.4): Chinese territorial claims and military build-up in the *South China Sea* ($\beta = 0.13$ SD, $p = 0.049$) and Chinese regional leadership vis-à-vis the US, specifically *China as Leader* ($\beta = 0.20$ SD, $p = 0.042$). Conversely, our treatment video did not have any meaningful effect on foreign policy attitudes among Malay respondents. These findings provide considerable evidence that transnational authoritarian propaganda effectively shapes foreign policy preferences among coethnic diaspora populations, but not among other non-coethnics, thereby contributing to greater polarization in policy preferences within recipient countries.

Taken together, the results show that China's transnational propaganda, while ostensibly aimed at promoting the "One China" principle over Taiwan, increased support for China's regional assertiveness among Chinese Malaysians. At the same time, it heightened suspicion and distrust among ethnic Malays toward the Chinese community in Malaysia. This demonstrates that even seemingly non-hostile propaganda not explicitly intended to sow domestic discord can nonetheless produce insidious and polarizing effects overseas.

Conclusion

Authoritarian information operations abroad have been on the rise in recent years (Cooley and Dukalskis 2025; Dukalskis 2021; Golovchenko et al. 2020; Mattingly et al. 2024). Many of these campaigns involve hostile interference aimed at disrupting democratic processes. Yet, for regimes like China, the primary goal of transnational propaganda is the promotion of authoritarian so-

ciopolitical models and cultural narratives (Mattingly et al. 2024). Our research shows that even in the absence of explicit intent to sabotage, such propaganda can still have insidious effects on recipient countries, particularly those with sizable diaspora communities.

Using a preregistered survey experiment in Malaysia, we provide evidence that China's propaganda significantly reduced ethnic Malays' social tolerance toward Chinese Malaysians, particularly through decreased intergroup trust. Such efforts undermine social cohesion within host societies by raising suspicions about the diaspora population's foreign allegiances. Conversely, the same content cultivates support for China's regional assertiveness and global leadership among Chinese Malaysians. These divergent ethnic responses indicate that transnational authoritarian propaganda can simultaneously polarize domestic audiences by weakening inter-ethnic cohesion while selectively mobilizing coethnic diaspora support for the regime's foreign policy agenda.

This study makes two key contributions to authoritarian and diaspora politics. First, it advances research on transnational authoritarianism by providing novel evidence that seemingly benign cross-border information campaigns can polarize domestic audiences along ethnic lines. Our findings identify ethnic identity as a mechanism through which authoritarian regimes undermine social cohesion in target countries while cultivating support for their global ambitions. Second, we contribute to diaspora politics by examining how authoritarian actors target ethnic communities that lack formal citizenship ties to the regime but remain receptive to their influence due to shared identity and cultural heritage. By showing how China's messaging resonates differently with Chinese Malaysians compared to ethnic Malays, our study highlights the capacity of authoritarian powers to exploit ethnic divisions abroad in pursuit of their geopolitical objectives.

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Online Appendix (OA)
Transnational Propaganda and Ethnic Polarization: Experimental
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OA1 Research Context

We conducted a survey experiment in Malaysia to analyze the attitudinal impacts of Chinese propaganda on intergroup relations and China's global image. Malaysia serves as an ideal research site for two reasons. First, Malaysia is home to a considerable Chinese diaspora population, consisting primarily of second-generation and later descendants of Chinese immigrants from two major waves: early migration during the 13th-14th centuries and a larger influx during the British colonial period (Tseng 2024). The 2020 Malaysian census data reveals that ethnic Chinese make up at least 20 percent of the population, while ethnic Malays form the majority at around 60 percent. Ethnic Malays are constitutionally recognized as the native population of the country and, alongside other indigenous peoples such as the *Orang Asli*, are often referred to as *Bumiputera* (or 'sons of the soil' in the Malay language).

The second reason relates to the underlying inter-ethnic tensions and constitutionally mandated policies favoring ethnic Malays in Malaysia. The country's constitution grants Malays (and other indigenous groups) a 'special position,' while the New Economic Policy, introduced since 1971, sought to redress disparities by uplifting Malays who lagged behind other ethnic groups in wealth and business ownership. This policy created pro-Malay quotas across multiple policy areas including university admissions, civil service employment, and business licensing (Weiss 1999). These preferential policies continue to enjoy widespread support among the Malay community (Merdeka Center for Opinion Research 2010). Such support was evident in 2018 when over 50,000 protesters rallied against the government's attempt to ratify the United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), believing that ratifying the treaty would force Malaysia to abandon its pro-Malay quotas and special privileges.¹

Conversely, the ethnic Chinese community has long harbored deep grievances over unfair treatment in Malaysia. Despite their economic contributions, Chinese Malaysians face systematic disadvantages through these preferential policies, even when they excel academically. For example, the Malaysian Matriculation Programme, which guarantees top secondary school graduates a spot in public universities, maintains a strict 90:10 ratio in which 90 percent of places are reserved for *Bumiputeras* and 10 percent for non-*Bumiputera* students. This quota system has denied pre-university places to many non-Malay straight-A students (Hassan 2025). Beyond educational barriers, the increasing influence of Islamic norms in public life – Islam being the dominant religion among ethnic Malays – has raised concerns among non-Muslim communities about Malaysia's shift from a multicultural nation toward one defined narrowly by Islamic identity (Tan 2001; Yow 2017). Many ethnic Chinese also feel politically marginalized and not fully accepted as equal citizens. These accumulated grievances have fostered a persistent sense of inequality and exclusion among Chinese Malaysians. This makes Malaysia a potentially fertile ground for the People's Republic of China (PRC) to polarize public opinion along ethnic lines.

¹ICERD is a United Nations convention which commits its members to eradicate racial discrimination and promote interracial understanding. As of the time of writing, Malaysia remains one of 14 countries that have yet to ratify ICERD.

OA2 Variables and Descriptive Statistics

Table OA2.1: **Outcome Measurements and Question Wordings**

Outcome	Items	Question Wording	Cronbach's alpha
Outgroup Social Tolerance	Thermometer	There are many groups in Malaysia, and we would like to get your feelings towards some of them using something we call a 'feeling thermometer.' ... Where would you put Chinese/Malay? [0-100]	0.73
	Neighbor	How comfortable would you be with having a Chinese/Malay family as your neighbor? [1-4]	
	Trust	How much do you trust people from the Chinese/Malay community in Malaysia? [1-4]	
Outgroup Political Threat	Influence	Do you agree or disagree that the Chinese/Malay community holds too much political influence in Malaysia? [1-4]	0.66
	Leader	Do you feel that the Chinese/Malay community holds more leadership positions in government than is fair in Malaysia? [1-4]	
	Undermine	Do you believe that the Chinese/Malay community are trying to undermine the political influence of your own ethnic group? [1-4]	
	Takeover	Do you feel concerned that members of other ethnic groups might take over all government leadership positions at the expense of your own ethnic group? [1-4]	
Support for China's FP	Taiwan	China claims that Taiwan is part of China and has sovereignty over Taiwan. It also claims that it will use military force to take back Taiwan if all peaceful means are exhausted. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'I support China's territorial claim over Taiwan.' [1-4]	0.68
	South China Sea	China claims sovereignty over the South China Sea and is strengthening its military presence there. Do you agree or disagree with the statement: 'China has a valid claim to the South China Sea and is justified in its military actions in the area'? [1-4]	
	China as Leader	Suppose either China or the United States will be the most powerful nation in the world in ten years. Would you strongly prefer the United as world leader or China as world leader? [1-6]	

Table OA2.2: **Description of Variables and Measurements**

Variables	Description and Measurements
Thermometer	Difference between outgroup and ingroup thermometer ratings. “There are many groups in Malaysia, and we would like to get your feelings towards some of them using something we call a ‘feeling thermometer.’ Here’s how it works: if you have a warm feeling towards a group or feel favorably towards it, you would place it somewhere between 50 and 100 degrees depending on how warm your feeling is towards the group. On the other hand, if you don’t feel very favorably towards a group, then you would place it somewhere between 0 and 50 degrees. Where would you put (Chinese/Malay)?” [0-100 points]
Neighbor	Difference in comfort levels toward an outgroup and ingroup neighbor. “How comfortable would you be with having a (Chinese/Malay) family as your neighbor?” 1 = Very uncomfortable 2 = Somewhat uncomfortable 3 = Comfortable 4 = Very comfortable
Trust	Difference between outgroup and ingroup trust. “How much do you trust people from the (Chinese/Malay) community in Malaysia?” 1 = Not at all 2 = Not much trust 3 = Somewhat trust 4 = Completely trust
Outgroup Social Tolerance	A composite measure of respondent’s social tolerance toward the ethnic outgroup relative to the ingroup. This was constructed by first asking respondents to evaluate both their ethnic ingroup and outgroup on <i>Thermometer</i> , <i>Neighbor</i> , and <i>Trust</i> . Next, we took the difference between outgroup and ingroup ratings for each item, standardized these differences, and using factor analysis to create composite scores.
Influence	Do you agree or disagree that the (Chinese/Malay) community holds too much political influence in Malaysia? 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly agree
Leader	Do you feel that the (Chinese/Malay) community holds more leadership positions in government than is fair in Malaysia? 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly agree

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Table OA2.2 – continued from previous page

Variables	Description and Measurements
Undermine	Do you believe that the (Chinese/Malay) community are trying to undermine the political influence of your own ethnic group? 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly agree
Takeover	Do you feel concerned that members of other ethnic groups might take over all government leadership positions at the expense of your own ethnic group? 1 = Not concerned at all 2 = Not very concerned 3 = Somewhat concerned 4 = Very concerned
Outgroup Political Threat	A composite measure of respondent's perception of outgroup political threat. This was constructed by first asking respondents to evaluate the outgroup on <i>Influence</i> , <i>Leader</i> , <i>Undermine</i> , and <i>Takeover</i> , then standardizing these differences, and using factor analysis to create composite scores.
Taiwan	China claims that Taiwan is part of China and has sovereignty over Taiwan. It also claims that it will use military force to take back Taiwan if all peaceful means are exhausted. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'I support China's territorial claim over Taiwan.' 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly agree
South China Sea	China claims sovereignty over the South China Sea and is strengthening its military presence there. Do you agree or disagree with the statement: 'China has a valid claim to the South China Sea and is justified in its military actions in the area?' 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly agree
China as Leader	Suppose either China or the United States will be the most powerful nation in the world in ten years. Would you: 1 = Strongly prefer the United States as world leader 2 = Prefer the United States 3 = Somewhat prefer the United States 4 = Somewhat prefer China 5 = Prefer China 6 = Strongly prefer China as world leader
Support for China's Foreign Policy	A composite measure of respondent's support for Chinese assertiveness in the region and its global standing. This was constructed by first asking respondents the following items: <i>Taiwan</i> , <i>South China Sea</i> , and <i>China as Leader</i> . We then standardized the responses, and used factor analysis to create composite scores.

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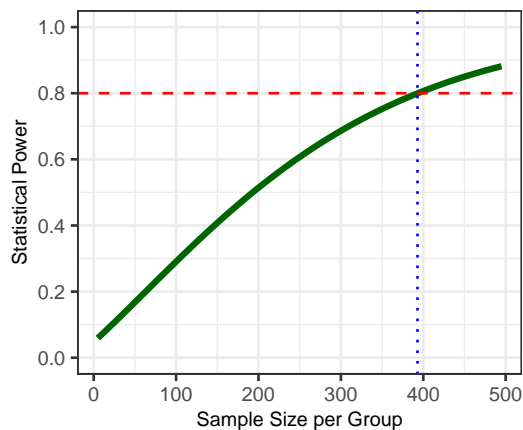
Variables	Description and Measurements
Language	Respondent's chosen survey language: English, Malay, Chinese
Female	Respondent's gender: 1 = Female, 0 = Otherwise
Malay	Respondent's ethnicity: 1 = Malay, 0 = Chinese
Age	Respondent's age
University	Respondent's highest education: 1 = University or higher, 0 = Otherwise
Household Income	Respondent's household income: 1 = Less than RM2,000 2 = RM2,000 - RM3,999 3 = RM4,000 - RM5,999 4 = RM6,000 - RM7,999 5 = RM8,000 - RM9,999 6 = RM10,000 and above
Local Media	Frequency in which respondent view local TV and newspapers 1 = Never 2 = Less than monthly 3 = Monthly 4 = Weekly 5 = Daily
Chinese Media	Frequency in which respondent view China-based TV and newspapers 1 = Never 2 = Less than monthly 3 = Monthly 4 = Weekly 5 = Daily
US Media	Frequency in which respondent view US-based TV and newspapers 1 = Never 2 = Less than monthly 3 = Monthly 4 = Weekly 5 = Daily
Social Media	Frequency in which respondent use social media for news 1 = Never 2 = Less than monthly 3 = Monthly 4 = Weekly 5 = Daily

Table OA2.3: **Descriptive Statistics of Variables**

	N	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max
Treat	1001	0.49	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00
Female	1001	0.51	0.50	1.00	0.00	1.00
Malay	1001	0.50	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00
Age	1001	37.37	12.25	36.00	17.00	81.00
University	1001	0.53	0.50	1.00	0.00	1.00
Household Income	1001	3.49	1.71	3.00	1.00	6.00
Local Media	1001	3.92	1.37	5.00	1.00	5.00
Chinese Media	1001	2.36	1.47	2.00	1.00	5.00
US Media	1001	2.57	1.39	2.00	1.00	5.00
Social Media	1001	4.70	0.76	5.00	1.00	5.00
Outgroup Social Tolerance	1001	0.00	1.00	0.27	-4.74	4.90
Thermometer	1001	-18.85	27.43	-12.50	-100.00	80.00
Neighbor	1001	-0.39	0.70	0.00	-3.00	2.00
Trust	1001	-0.23	0.59	0.00	-3.00	3.00
Outgroup Political Threat	1001	-0.00	1.00	0.11	-3.29	1.81
Influence	1001	3.00	0.79	3.00	1.00	4.00
Leader	1001	2.83	0.79	3.00	1.00	4.00
Undermine	1001	2.93	0.74	3.00	1.00	4.00
Takeover	1001	3.00	0.78	3.00	1.00	4.00
Support for China's Foreign Policy	1001	-0.00	1.00	-0.02	-1.75	2.92
Taiwan	1001	2.14	0.79	2.00	1.00	4.00
South China Sea	1001	1.88	0.79	2.00	1.00	4.00
China as Leader	1001	3.82	1.09	4.00	1.00	6.00

OA3 Experimental Manipulation and Covariate Balance

Figure OA3.1: **Power Analysis**



Notes: The power curve shows statistical power as a function of sample size, assuming a Cohen's d effect size of 0.2 and a significance level of $p = 0.05$.

The transcript of the treatment video is as follows:²

Narrator: More than 3,000 members of the global Chinese community took part this weekend at a convention calling for a peaceful reunification of China. The participants pushed for upholding the “One China” principle while opposing Taiwan independence. Launched 22 years ago, the conference comes amid a strained cross-strait relations.

Chinese interviewee in Chinese: Since US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan, there has been a lot of disinformation in western countries. So, we really need overseas Chinese to unite together to go through this difficult process.

Narrator: Participants highlighted a key consensus reached between the Mainland (China) and Taiwan in 1992. Under the framework, both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China and will work together toward national reunification.

Chinese interviewee in Chinese: I think it has already been in the process of reunification and we should work out some of the unsolved problems. The economy is the foundation. Besides, we should solve some political problems and emotional and cultural identity problems to awaken Taiwan people’s Chinese identity.

Narrator: The conference saw the adoption of the Chengdu Declaration. It emphasizes that the “One China” principle cannot be challenged and the peaceful development of cross strait relations is unstoppable.

Chinese interviewee in Chinese: The Declaration gives Taiwan independence forces a serious warning. We sincerely hope for peaceful reunification, but we still have another option: that is, to use force. If they declare Taiwan independence, we have no other choice but to use force.

Narrator: The key document also points out that China must be reunified. It asserts that Taiwan independence is a path that leads to nowhere.

Chinese interviewee in Chinese: This conference has sent a message to the Overseas Chinese that our determination and confidence in China’s reunification will never change. It is inevitable and necessary for Taiwan to achieve reunification. And any attempt or action to separate Taiwan from China will surely meet with shame or failure.

Narrator: A number of speakers urge the countries to stop interfering in China’s internal affairs and return to mutual respect. Participants of the conference have agreed that reunification is an essential step towards national rejuvenation. They call on oversea Chinese to jointly defend and promote the cause of peaceful reunification and not tolerate the separatist activities of those seeking Taiwan independence.

²The original video content from CGTN is available at this link.

Table OA3.4: **Covariate Balance**

Covariates	Control	Treated	<i>p</i> -value
Language (%)			0.098
English	295 (58.0)	291 (59.1)	
Chinese	63 (12.4)	41 (8.3)	
Malay	151 (29.7)	160 (32.5)	
Region (%)			0.486
Central region	152 (29.9)	148 (30.1)	
East coast	76 (14.9)	78 (15.9)	
East Malaysia	69 (13.6)	62 (12.6)	
Northern region	98 (19.3)	112 (22.8)	
Southern region	114 (22.4)	92 (18.7)	
Female (mean (SD))	0.50 (0.50)	0.53 (0.50)	0.234
Malay (mean (SD))	0.49 (0.50)	0.50 (0.50)	0.683
Age (mean (SD))	36.73 (11.82)	38.02 (12.65)	0.097
University (mean (SD))	0.53 (0.50)	0.53 (0.50)	0.900
Household Income (mean (SD))	3.49 (1.66)	3.48 (1.76)	0.960
Local Media (mean (SD))	3.90 (1.41)	3.94 (1.33)	0.616
Chinese Media (mean (SD))	2.34 (1.45)	2.37 (1.48)	0.783
US Media (mean (SD))	2.52 (1.39)	2.61 (1.40)	0.307
Social Media (mean (SD))	4.69 (0.74)	4.71 (0.77)	0.723

OA4 Empirical Findings

Table OA4.5: **Effects of Chinese State Media Exposure on Composite Outcomes**

DV =	Outgroup Social Tolerance	Outgroup Political Threat	Support for China's FP
Treatment	-0.062 (0.063)	-0.022 (0.063)	0.056 (0.063)
<i>N</i>	993	996	994

Notes: Table entries are standardized coefficient estimates. Conventional standard errors are displayed in parentheses. ***p* < 0.01; **p* < 0.05; †*p* < 0.1.

Table OA4.6: Effects of Chinese State Media Exposure on Composite Outcomes – With Covariates

DV =	Outgroup Social Tolerance	Outgroup Political Threat	Support for China's FP
Treatment	−0.035 (0.058)	−0.039 (0.064)	0.057 (0.061)
Language: Chinese	−0.142 (0.106)	−0.211 [†] (0.116)	0.139 (0.111)
Language: Malay	−0.516** (0.086)	0.223* (0.094)	0.007 (0.090)
Female	0.133* (0.060)	−0.169* (0.066)	0.121 [†] (0.063)
Malay	−0.412** (0.084)	−0.406** (0.092)	−0.349** (0.088)
Age	−0.005 [†] (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)	0.005* (0.003)
University	0.080 (0.064)	0.064 (0.070)	−0.179** (0.067)
Household Income	−0.006 (0.019)	−0.012 (0.021)	−0.037 [†] (0.020)
Local Media	0.011 (0.025)	−0.012 (0.027)	0.006 (0.026)
China Media	−0.036 (0.027)	0.041 (0.029)	0.190** (0.028)
US Media	0.092** (0.028)	−0.045 (0.031)	−0.097** (0.030)
Social Media	−0.073 [†] (0.040)	0.021 (0.043)	−0.074 [†] (0.041)
<i>N</i>	971	974	973
Region FE	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Table entries are standardized coefficient estimates. Conventional standard errors are displayed in parentheses. The reference category for *Language* is English. See Table OA2.2 for a detailed description of the variable measurements. ***p* < 0.01; **p* < 0.05; [†]*p* < 0.1.

Table OA4.7: Effects of Chinese State Media Exposure on Social Tolerance Items

DV =	Thermometer	Neighbor	Trust
Treat	−2.363 (1.738)	−0.015 (0.045)	−0.036 (0.037)
<i>N</i>	996	1,001	998

Notes: Table entries are unstandardized coefficient estimates. Conventional standard errors are displayed in parentheses. ***p* < 0.01; **p* < 0.05; [†]*p* < 0.1.

Table OA4.8: **Effects of Chinese State Media Exposure on Political Threat Items**

DV =	Influence	Leader	Undermine	Takeover
Treat	-0.040 (0.050)	-0.020 (0.050)	-0.015 (0.047)	0.020 (0.049)
<i>N</i>	999	1,000	1,000	1,000

Notes: Table entries are unstandardized coefficient estimates. Conventional standard errors are displayed in parentheses. ***p* < 0.01; **p* < 0.05; †*p* < 0.1.

Table OA4.9: **Effects of Chinese State Media Exposure on China’s Foreign Policy**

DV =	Taiwan	South China Sea	China as Leader
Treat	0.043 (0.050)	0.044 (0.050)	0.017 (0.069)
<i>N</i>	1,000	1,001	995

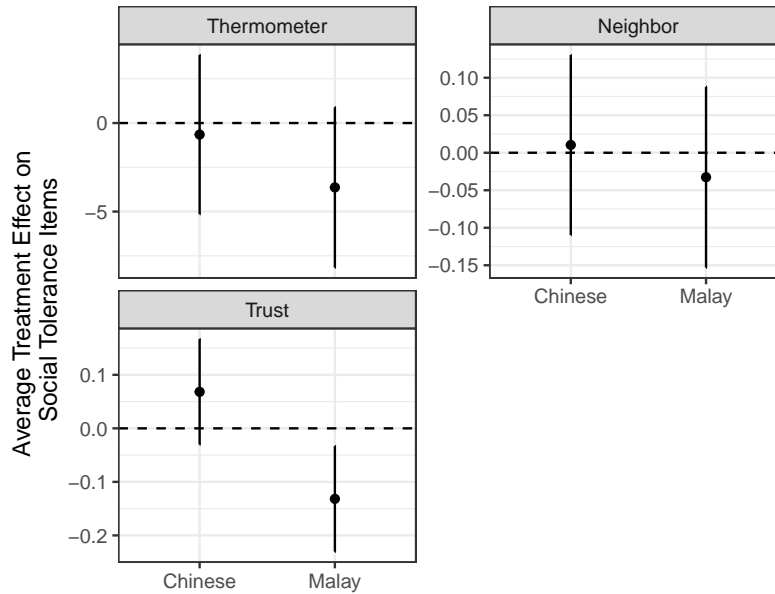
Notes: Table entries are standardized coefficient estimates. Conventional standard errors are displayed in parentheses. ***p* < 0.01; **p* < 0.05; †*p* < 0.1.

Table OA4.10: **Conditional Effects of Chinese State Media Exposure on Composite Outcomes By Respondent’s Ethnicity**

DV =	Outgroup Social Tolerance	Outgroup Political Threat	Support for China’s FP
Treatment	0.048 (0.084)	-0.024 (0.089)	0.182* (0.087)
Malay	-0.620** (0.083)	-0.256** (0.088)	-0.311** (0.087)
Treatment × Malay	-0.202† (0.118)	0.010 (0.126)	-0.245* (0.124)
<i>N</i>	993	996	994

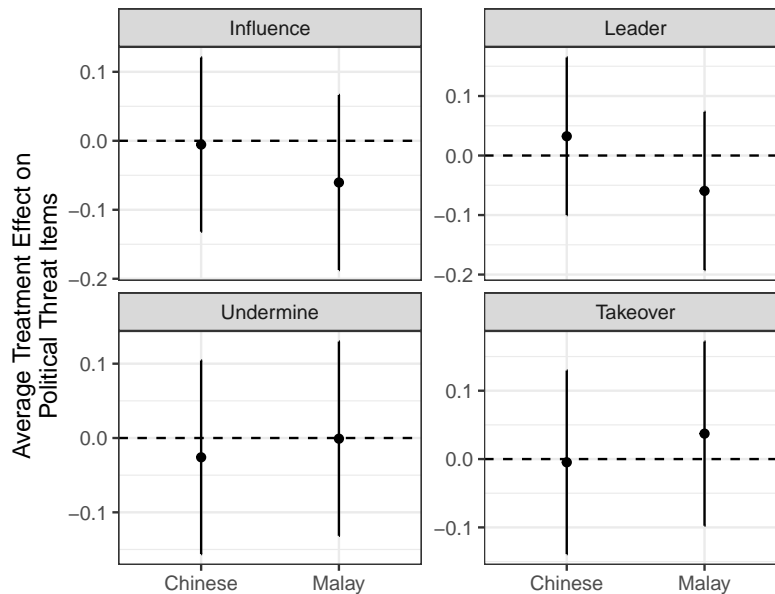
Notes: Table entries are standardized coefficient estimates. Conventional standard errors are displayed in parentheses. ***p* < 0.01; **p* < 0.05; †*p* < 0.1.

Figure OA4.2: **Conditional Treatment Effects on Outgroup Social Tolerance Items**



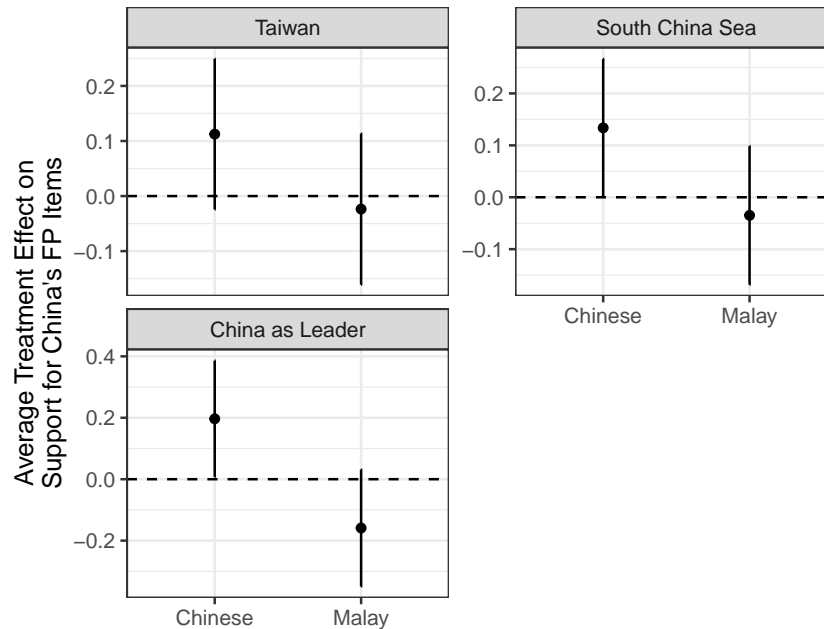
Notes: The plots display average treatment effects and 95% confidence intervals for the three items that comprise *Outgroup Social Tolerance* – *Thermometer*, *Neighbor*, and *Trust*, with separate estimates by respondent’s ethnicity (Chinese and Malay)

Figure OA4.3: **Conditional Treatment Effects on Outgroup Political Threat Items**



Notes: The plots display average treatment effects and 95% confidence intervals for the four items that comprise *Outgroup Political Threat* – *Influence*, *Leader*, *Undermine*, and *Takeover*, with separate estimates by respondent’s ethnicity (Chinese and Malay)

Figure OA4.4: **Conditional Treatment Effects on Support for China's FP Items**



Notes: The plots display average treatment effects and 95% confidence intervals for the three items that comprise *Support for China's Foreign Policy* – *Taiwan*, *South China Sea*, and *China as Leader*, with separate estimates by respondent's ethnicity (Chinese and Malay)

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