

# Pride and Prejudice: The Dual Effects of “Wolf Warrior Diplomacy” on Domestic and International Audiences

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## Abstract

China has shifted its foreign policy from careful diplomacy to “wolf warrior diplomacy” (WWD). I argue that WWD increases the Chinese public’s support for their government. However, foreign audiences are likely to view WWD as aggressive and threatening; as a result, WWD has dual effects, increased security for the regime at the domestic level and heightened tensions at the international level. To examine these hypotheses, I conducted preregistered parallel experiments, in which I presented identical sets of survey vignettes to Chinese and American citizens. The results show that WWD significantly increases the Chinese public’s support for their government. However, this diplomatic rhetoric also antagonizes the U.S. public and bolsters their support for aggressive foreign policies toward China. These findings contribute to our understanding of the dual effects of authoritarian diplomacy in the global arena where national leaders face a trade-off between preserving domestic support and triggering international hostility.

## Keywords

diplomacy, U.S.–China relations, experiments, and public opinion

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## Introduction

China's international image remains at historic lows in most countries worldwide (Silver 2021; Xie and Jin 2021). One might therefore expect Chinese diplomats to prioritize the initiatives aimed at improving the country's image and regaining the goodwill of international audiences. However, Chinese diplomats are breaking with their tradition of pursuing careful diplomacy. Today, they are more likely to behave like "wolf warriors" and respond to criticism with inflammatory and belligerent rhetoric (e.g., Dai and Luqiu 2022; Martin 2021; Sullivan and Wang 2022). This raises an interesting puzzle: Why do Chinese leaders publicly antagonize foreign audiences when a major goal of diplomacy is to improve relations among countries? To gain traction on this broad question, I focus on the following specific research question: What are the domestic and international consequences of China's "wolf warrior diplomacy" (WWD)?

I argue that WWD increases the Chinese public's support for their government. WWD may function as a domestic tool for national leaders to garner local support, even if it risks alienating foreign audiences. The dual effects of WWD underscore the nature of international diplomacy as a two-level game, where national governments simultaneously engage with both domestic and international audiences (Matush 2023; Putnam 1988). At the domestic level, citizens exert pressure on national governments to adopt policies aligned with their interests. Governments, in turn, aim to mitigate adverse effects stemming from foreign developments to placate local audiences (Putnam 1988, 443). Yet, when domestic and international audience objectives collide, leaders typically prioritize domestic interests at the expense of heightened international tensions. This inherent trade-off between preserving domestic support and triggering international criticism contributes to our comprehension of ongoing diplomatic tensions between the United States (U.S.) and China.

To test the multiple effects of WWD, I ran parallel survey experiments in China and the U.S. Participants from each country read one of three types of WWD, pride, humiliation, and defamatory rhetoric. In the survey conducted in China, I find that all three types of WWD increase the Chinese public's support for their government. Meanwhile, humiliation rhetoric increases the Chinese public's support for more aggressive foreign policies toward the U.S.

In the U.S. survey, I find that all three types of WWD antagonize American citizens and boost their support for aggressive foreign policies toward China. Combined these surveys offer strong support for the argument that WWD operates differently at home versus abroad. WWD solidifies domestic support for the Chinese government and concurrently increases antagonistic attitudes toward China in the U.S.

This paper makes three major contributions to the fields of international diplomacy and great power competition. First, this paper enhances our understanding of international public diplomacy. Traditionally, international public diplomacy has been perceived as primarily directed toward foreign audiences (Nye 2008). However, my research indicates that domestic audiences are equally significant in understanding

international diplomacy. In essence, international diplomacy operates as a two-level game, wherein national governments aim to align with the national interests of both domestic and international audiences concurrently (Putnam 1988, 443). However, due to distinct interests and objectives of domestic and international audiences, identical messages may yield divergent outcomes at home and abroad. Although the concept of the two-level game has been extensively discussed, there is surprisingly little experimental research that tests the effects of international diplomacy at both domestic and international levels. This paper presents the first experimental evidence demonstrating the consequences of identical diplomatic rhetoric at home and abroad simultaneously, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the effects of international diplomacy.

Second, while this paper primarily focuses on the rhetoric of Chinese diplomats, the use of international diplomacy for domestic objectives is not exclusive to China. Leaders in democratic countries also commonly employ this strategy. Through an examination of Israeli and U.S. attitudes before and after Netanyahu's visit to the U.S. Congress in 2015, Matush (2023) finds that Netanyahu's confrontational speeches enhanced support among far-right Israeli voters while simultaneously alienating U.S. Democrats. Similarly, Theresa May's assertive rhetoric toward European leaders during Brexit negotiations garnered support from domestic pro-Brexit constituencies, but strained relations with other European partners (BBC 2018). In upholding his "America First" agenda and galvanizing support from the voters in the Republican primary, former U.S. President Donald Trump discussed not lending support to NATO allies that failed to meet their financial commitments to national defense spending (Sullivan 2024). This stance, while resonating with his targeted domestic constituencies, faced considerable opposition from discontented European allies. While the target audiences and diplomatic campaigns may differ across countries, the underlying rationale behind WWD extends beyond China: alienating and antagonizing international audiences may yield domestic public support.

Third, this research presents a novel perspective on the influence of domestic politics on great power competition. A significant portion of the literature concerning great power competition attributes the escalating tensions between the U.S. and China to shifts in relative power dynamics (Allison 2017; Tammen et al., 2000). Building upon a burgeoning body of literature that underscores domestic factors in explaining international relations (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1994; Moravcisk 1997; Weiss and Wallace 2021), this study implies that Chinese domestic politics play a pivotal role in shaping tensions between the U.S. and China. While previous scholars have demonstrated that national leaders may resort to international crises to address domestic economic and political challenges (Mueller 1970), I suggest that Chinese leaders might instead deploy intergroup discourses, such as WWD, to rally domestic support amidst mounting economic pressures. By emphasizing the role of social identity in elucidating the dynamics of great power competition, this paper contributes to an expanding body of psychological research that examines how individual-level attributes—such as identity, predispositions, and emotions—contribute to great power rivalry and

territorial conflicts (Barnhart 2017; Kaufman 2019; Snyder 1991). This new psychological explanation for U.S.-China relations offers a complementary understanding alongside structural explanations for great power competition (e.g., Mearsheimer 2003; Organski 1958; Waltz 1979).

## **Domestic Consequences of WWD**

I propose a theoretical framework that explains how WWD shapes Chinese public sentiment toward their government at the domestic level. First, WWD encourages Chinese citizens to appreciate their powerful and prosperous country under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Second, WWD brings latent memories of the “Century of Humiliation” to the forefront and diverts the Chinese public’s attention to the poor human rights practices and social instability in Western countries. In doing so, it effectively reinforces prejudice against foreign states among the Chinese public, thereby rallying domestic support.

Previous studies regard WWD as a “new confrontational approach” in diplomacy (Martin 2021, 3) or as “a style of rhetoric that is assertive, aggressive, combative and even insulting” (Dai and Luqiu 2022, 264).<sup>1</sup> In their examination of the discourse of Chinese diplomats during regular conferences held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) from 2001 to 2020, Dai and Luqiu (2022) find a discernible increase in the assertiveness and hostile tone of communications of Chinese diplomats, particularly during the tenure of President Xi. The prevailing body of literature regarding WWD generally assumes that Chinese leaders can rally domestic support by employing confrontational rhetoric (e.g., Martin 2021; Smith 2021, 10). However, scant empirical evidence has been presented to substantiate this assumption.

On the one hand, the use of WWD is perplexing. For years, Chinese citizens have been indoctrinated to believe that they are peace-loving people and that China is dedicated to achieving a peaceful rise (Xi 2014). A survey reveals that the majority of Chinese citizens endorse a policy of peaceful negotiation for effectively managing sensitive territorial disputes in the South China Sea (Chubb 2014, 10). As a result, it is reasonable to believe that aggressive and confrontational language could create cognitive dissonance, ultimately failing to rally domestic support for the Chinese government.

I argue that WWD benefits the Chinese government by fostering ingroup pride and outgroup prejudice. Individuals naturally form groups and differentiate themselves from outgroups by establishing a positive identity (Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Individuals build positive identities through two strategies: (1) instilling a “feeling of ingroup pride” and (2) highlighting “derogatory attitudes toward outgroup members, and/or prejudicial behavior toward outgroup members” (Hornsey and Hogg 2000, 242).<sup>2</sup>

Wolf warrior rhetoric uses both strategies to enhance domestic support.<sup>3</sup> The first strategy is to use rhetoric that accentuates ingroup pride (pride discourses). Within the pride discourses, Chinese diplomats emphasize economic accomplishments and social

stability as a means of bolstering a positive ingroup identity and mobilizing the Chinese public's support for their government. For instance, Chinese diplomats emphasize a thriving and prosperous China, in which all citizens experience an unparalleled sense of security, peace, and happiness under the leadership of the CCP.

The second strategy utilizes rhetoric that emphasizes outgroup prejudice. Within this strategy, I identify two types of outgroup rhetoric: first, humiliation rhetoric emphasizing the "Century of Humiliation" and, second, defamatory rhetoric, which develops unfavorable images of the outgroup. The use of humiliation and defamatory rhetoric aims to foster a positive ingroup identity by drawing attention to the negative portrayals, misdeeds, and malevolent activities of outgroups. The ultimate goal of humiliation and defamatory rhetoric is to increase support for the Chinese government, with foreign actors being used as a tool toward that end.

Before delving into the exploration of these types of wolf-warrior rhetoric, I explain how this research differs from existing research on WWD and international diplomacy. [Mattingly and Sundquist \(2023\)](#) also examine the effects of WWD. This research differs in three ways. First, [Mattingly and Sundquist \(2023\)](#) examine how WWD affects public opinion in a third country, India. They explore how WWD shapes Indian perceptions of the U.S. and China, along with Indian foreign policy toward China. In contrast, my paper investigates public opinion within the U.S. and China, concentrating on how WWD influences Chinese public support for aggressive foreign policies against the U.S. and how WWD influences the U.S. public support for aggressive foreign policies against China. Second, [Mattingly and Sundquist](#) explore the international consequences of WWD, while my research examines both international and domestic consequences. Third, this paper further explores ingroup/outgroup psychological mechanisms underlying the domestic and international consequences of WWD, a focus distinct from that of [Mattingly and Sundquist's](#) study.

[Weiss and Dafoe \(2019\)](#) examine the effects of Chinese rhetoric and propaganda on audience costs. They find that biding time narratives and humiliation rhetoric mitigate domestic public backlash when the Chinese government opts not to take action in territorial and maritime disputes after issuing threats during military crises. I also examine humiliation rhetoric and its effects on the Chinese public. However, our research contexts, or scenarios, are quite different. Their focus lies in assessing how humiliation rhetoric mitigates disapproval of inaction in territorial disputes, whereas my paper examines multiple types of wolf-warrior diplomacy, including humiliation rhetoric, in the context of China-U.S. relations. More precisely, I examine the effect of WWD on Chinese public endorsement of assertive foreign policies toward the U.S. and on the U.S. public's support for assertive foreign policies toward China.

[Matush \(2023\)](#) also highlights the dual effects of diplomatic rhetoric. This research differs from [Matush](#) in three ways. First, [Matush](#) focuses on a rational actor explanation for provoking foreign audiences, while I examine a psychological explanation anchored in ingroup/outgroup dynamics. Second, this research focuses on wolf-warrior rhetoric and China-U.S. relations, whereas [Matush](#) focuses on Israel-U.S. relations.

Third, Matush analyzes observational data, while I field and analyze parallel survey experiments.

### *The Pride of Citizens of the People's Republic of China (PRC)*

National leaders aim to cultivate a sense of pride in their country to bolster support for the government. Pride, a positive emotion, links individual-level self-esteem to group-level social identity. Individuals feel pride when they act or behave in ways that lead to ingroup success. These pride-eliciting issues render individuals valuable, satisfied, and joyful, which, in turn, strengthens their identification with positive collective images within the social group and fosters unity among ingroups (Barrett 1995). Chinese leaders, for instance, highlight the tremendous economic growth in recent decades to boost the self-esteem of Chinese citizens and to obtain public support for the government (Xi 2017). Therefore, I propose the first hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1a:** Discourses of pride increase the Chinese public's support for the Chinese government.

Does a pride discourse lead to public support for an aggressive foreign policy? Existing literature argues that ingroup pride does not inevitably lead to intergroup conflicts. Individuals demonstrate overwhelmingly positive evaluations of the ingroup over the outgroup; however, maintaining positive identities does not motivate ingroups to harm outgroups (e.g., Brewer 1979, 1999). When people identify as members of a social ingroup, they generally conform to the norms that define their identity, aiming to alleviate psychological discomfort (Abdelal, Herrera, and Johnston 2009).

As per Beijing's official propaganda, the concept of China's resurgence is portrayed as a pursuit to rectify injustices in an unjust world and facilitate the restoration of a harmonious international order (Zhao 2015). These narratives have been transmitted from Hu Jintao's concept of the "Harmonious World" to Xi Jinping's (2014) speech portraying China as a nation that loves peace. Chinese people are proud of their national past when China was a world leader without aggressive intentions. Thus, nationalistic discourses with an emphasis on Chinese national achievements weaken hawkish foreign policies and increase the Chinese public's support for dovish foreign policies (Ko 2023). This yields the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1b:** Discourses of pride do not increase the Chinese public's support for aggressive foreign policy.

### *The "Century of Humiliation"*

National leaders also enhance domestic support by encouraging outgroup prejudice. The prejudice against the outgroup aims to cultivate a positive perception of the CCP, portraying it as a robust defender of Chinese citizens capable of warding off foreign powers.

One strategy China's leaders use to create outgroup prejudice is to remind their people of the "Century of Humiliation." This humiliation rhetoric reminds the Chinese of unjust aggression committed against them (Herrmann 2017), creating a sense of victimhood, and compelling them to unite behind the strong leadership of the CCP to prevent a repeat of the injustice (Barnhart 2017; Wang 2008). In his speech on the CCP's 100th anniversary, Xi Jinping (2021) stressed the humiliation and misery inflicted by the Western powers before calling on the Chinese people to unify behind the leadership of CCP.<sup>4</sup> This yields the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2a:** Discourses of humiliation increase the Chinese public's support for the Chinese government.

Furthermore, Chinese diplomatic discourses are likely to heighten public support for aggressive foreign policy by reinforcing prejudices against hostile outgroups. When individuals experience humiliation, they harbor narcissistic rage and challenge the existing world order through confrontational rhetoric and actions in an attempt to restore their self-esteem (Steinberg 1991). As a result, there is an increased probability of causing harm to others. This humiliation mechanism also accounts for the aggression during WWII (Lindner 2014), as well as the violence perpetrated by terrorism and suicide bombers (Atran 2003; Atran and Stern 2005). This yields the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2b:** Discourses of humiliation increase the Chinese public's support for aggressive foreign policy.

### *Defamatory Narratives of the Outgroup*

In addition to humiliation rhetoric, defamatory rhetoric that portrays the outgroup unfavorably can also strengthen the Chinese public's support for their government. National leaders use critical narratives about outgroups to cultivate a favorable self-image, thereby strengthening internal cohesion. Defamatory discourses mobilize domestic support by highlighting the problems of the outgroup (like human rights violations, racism, and social inequality), and subsequently channeling this bias against the outgroup into favorable sentiments toward the Chinese government. Indeed, similar dynamics are observed in Western societies, where the attitudes of local citizens toward immigrants are susceptible to the impact of defamatory rhetoric (e.g., Bernhard, Fischbacher, and Fehr 2006). The ingroup harbors contempt toward the outgroup, labeling them as inept and inferior, which in turn reinforces a stronger inclination toward favoritism within the ingroup (Fischer and Giner-Sorolla 2016).

To bolster internal unity, Chinese diplomats have progressively embraced defamatory rhetoric that emphasizes human rights abuses in the U.S. For instance, faced with the U.S. accusations of Chinese human rights abuses, the Chinese government resorts to defamatory narratives of U.S. human rights by underscoring Washington's "persecution of indigenous children, widespread police violence, deep-seated racism, [and]

proliferation of firearms” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China 2021). Accordingly, the Chinese public is expected to exhibit a greater tendency to unite under the leadership of the Chinese government, particularly when instances of the outgroup’s transgressions are emphasized. This leads to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3a:** Defamatory discourses increase the Chinese public’s support for the Chinese government.

Do defamatory narratives contribute to a rise in public endorsement of aggressive foreign policies? One strand of IR literature argues they do. For example, one form of defamatory rhetoric is *infrahumanization*, wherein ingroups belittle outgroups by assigning them a lower level of humanity compared to their own (Leyens et al., 2001). Such defamatory rhetoric reinforces biases against outgroups and prolongs intergroup animosity, which in turn generates intergroup conflicts (Leyens et al., 2007). Another strand of literature, however, argues that defamatory rhetoric may serve as a prerequisite for aggressive foreign policy, but it alone is inadequate to provoke aggression toward outgroups (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1990; Kaufman 2019). Ingroups tend to exhibit violence, aggression, and intolerance only when their survival is jeopardized by outgroups (Cohen et al., 2005). Accordingly, it is unlikely that defamatory rhetoric would provoke the Chinese public toward a more aggressive foreign policy, given that their physical safety is not substantially endangered by verbal accusations from the U.S. regarding Chinese human rights.

Considering that these two strands of literature have different predictions and the net effect of these divergent mechanisms on the public’s support for aggressive foreign policy is unclear, I test the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 3b:** Defamatory discourses increase the Chinese public’s support for aggressive foreign policy.

**Hypothesis 3c:** Defamatory discourses do not increase the Chinese public’s support for aggressive foreign policy.

I conclude this section by delineating the scope conditions for my theory. My theory hinges on a distinct cleavage between favorable ingroups and hostile outgroups. These hostile outgroups may have been adversaries or colonizers in the past, or they may currently represent political competitors. It is only when ingroups reach a consensus regarding the identity of these hostile outgroups that rhetoric concerning ingroup-outgroup dynamics becomes effective.

## **International Consequences of WWD**

The consequences of WWD are not confined within national borders. The second part of my theory focuses on the international consequences of WWD. International diplomacy is a two-level game in which foreign policymakers seek to reconcile domestic and international pressures simultaneously. At the national level, domestic audiences



pressure national governments to adopt policies in favor of their interests, while national governments try to persuade their domestic constituents to support them. At the international level, national governments seek to satisfy domestic audiences while minimizing adverse foreign consequences (Putnam 1988).

These objectives may conflict with each other. Given the disparate perspectives held by domestic and international audiences, the same message will have contrasting effects on the two audiences. Wolf warrior rhetoric stating that a powerful China will not back down on human rights issues, for instance, is expected to mobilize the support of the Chinese public. The same language simultaneously demonstrates a combative approach in diplomacy and alienates international audiences. This tension in perspectives is now running high between the Chinese and American public. WWD, for China, is a self-defense to “fight back and speak the truth in the face of unscrupulous attacks, slanders and denigration” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China 2020). However, WWD, for the U.S., signals Beijing’s dramatic foreign policy shift from conciliatory foreign policy to aggressive foreign policy. To summarize, while WWD increases the Chinese public’s support for their government, these domestic benefits also have consequences at the international level. International audiences will respond to WWD with an aggressive foreign policy.

Yet how does WWD motivate U.S. citizens to adopt hardline positions? Gilpin (1986, 290), for instance, perceives interstate conflicts as a group-based competition over the distribution of scarce resources (e.g., wealth, power, land, and jobs) in the name of “nation-states.” Current U.S.–China diplomatic tensions originate from intergroup competition about economic, military, and political influence on the international stage. Consequently, the discourse of pride with an emphasis on China’s economic achievements will foster Americans’ feelings of competition with China and intensify the perception of an intergroup threat. When people face realistic threats to the ingroup’s political and economic power, they will become aggressive and intolerant (Horowitz 1985). Similarly, the defamatory discourse against the U.S. role as a global leader and its human rights practices will pose a symbolic threat to the central values Americans hold dear. I expect that such a defamatory discourse will trigger symbolic threats and increase American support for a hardline policy against China. This yields the following two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 4:** Discourses of pride increase the U.S. public’s support for aggressive foreign policy

**Hypothesis 5:** Defamatory discourses increase the U.S. public’s support for aggressive foreign policy.

Finally, according to existing literature, the use of humiliation rhetoric generates support among victimized ingroups for aggressive policies toward outgroups (e.g., Barnhart 2017; Masterson 2022). However, extant research offers limited insights regarding how outgroups would respond to the humiliation rhetoric from the victimized group. In this specific case, the American public possesses a limited understanding of

China's historical experience of the "Century of Humiliation," consequently resulting in a lack of understanding toward humiliation rhetoric. Thus, it is expected that humiliation rhetoric will have little influence on the attitude of the U.S. public toward China. This yields our final hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 6:** Discourses of humiliation do not increase the U.S. public's support for aggressive foreign policy.

## Parallel Experimental Designs

To investigate WWD's domestic and international consequences, I conducted pre-registered parallel survey experiments in China and the U.S., in which I presented an identical set of experimental surveys to Chinese and American citizens.<sup>5</sup> Conducting a nationwide survey allows me to understand the way Chinese public opinion influences Chinese foreign policy. While the influence of Chinese public opinion on foreign policy remains subject to debate, there are reasons to believe it matters. For example, an expanding body of literature substantiates the concept of "two-way interactions." This framework suggests that not only do state policies shape public sentiment, but public opinion may also constrain leaders' policies (Milner and Tingley 2013, 392; c.f., Bell and Quek 2018, 232). These "two-way interactions" are discernible in both Chinese domestic policy (Chen, Pan, and Xu 2016) and foreign policy, particularly in the context of China's interactions with Japan and the U.S. (Reilly 2011).

An emerging scholarship highlights that Chinese leaders are increasingly responsive to public preferences on foreign policy matters (e.g., Fang, Li, and Liu 2022; Zhao 2013, 2022). In the contemporary Information Age, Chinese citizens are inclined to express their opinions online and research indicates that public opinion on foreign affairs may exert significant pressure on the Chinese government (Fang, Li, and Liu 2022). While one approach to managing this pressure involves suppressing dissent and controlling "mass incidents" through a growing public security budget, a more economically prudent strategy is to "give citizens a sense of inclusion and influence on policy decisions" (Fang, Li and Liu 2022, 30). This approach not only bolsters the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party but also contributes to Chinese domestic stability.

I conducted a national survey in January 2023 that covered all 31 provinces and capital municipalities in mainland China. I contracted a survey partner to recruit a sample of 1500 Chinese citizens to match the 2020 National Census adult population on gender, age, and geography. This sampling strategy ensures that the sample is diverse in different demographic characteristics. Table A14 in the Appendix compares our sample with the census benchmarks, along with a detailed description of our stratified sampling strategy.

After answering various demographic questions (e.g., age, education, and gender) and successfully passing two attention check questions,<sup>6</sup> respondents were assigned randomly to one of five experimental groups with equal probability (one control group and four treatment groups). I created a scenario based on current political disputes between the U.S. and China. Participants began the experimental portion by reading the

following vignette: “The relationship between the U.S. and China receives widespread international attention. While both sides agree on some issues, they disagree on others. The U.S. accuses China of abusing human rights and violating trade agreements. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs denies these accusations.”

After reading the vignette, respondents in the control group did not receive additional information. Respondents in the treatment groups read an additional piece of discourse adapted from Chinese diplomats’ discourses from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ (MFA) webpage. The experimental treatments exhibit two essential characteristics. First, every vignette attributes the treatment source to the MFA. As statements from the MFA reflect the authoritative viewpoint of the Chinese government in matters of foreign affairs, this attribution ensures that participants recognize the treatment as the official position of the Chinese government. This, in turn, improves the accuracy of measuring public endorsement of WWD within the Chinese public. Second, each treatment captures a vital mechanism of ingroup pride or outgroup prejudice that shapes public opinion in my theory.

Respondents in the pride group read a variant of wolf warrior discourse that claimed, “The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs adds that China is a powerful country with the full confidence and capability to protect its national interests.” Respondents in the humiliation group read a variant of the wolf warrior discourse that claimed, “The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs adds that China will never forget the ‘Century of Humiliation’ when the Chinese people were subjected to bullying and humiliation by foreign powers.” Respondents in the defamatory group read a variant of wolf warrior discourse that claimed, “The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs adds that U.S. human rights violations are too numerous to record, pointing to issues of deep-seated racism and use of torture on prisoners.”

The final treatment group was conciliatory rhetoric, a non-wolf-warrior discourse. Respondents in the conciliatory group read a variant of non-wolf-warrior discourse that claimed, “The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs adds that China is willing to further strengthen dialogue on relevant issues on the basis of equality and mutual respect.” If my expectations are correct, the conciliatory rhetoric will not significantly increase the Chinese public’s support for their government because such rhetoric neither strengthens ingroup favoritism nor outgroup prejudice. In other words, if the Chinese public’s approval rating of their government only increases with wolf warrior rhetoric, we conclude that such an increase derives from the public’s support for wolf warrior rhetoric rather than any other government framing strategy.

After participants received the survey instruments, they were asked the extent to which they supported the Chinese government. To measure Chinese public support for their government, I asked “Do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the way China handled the situation?” I will focus on raw percentage approval. Approval coded 1 if the respondent approved, and zero otherwise (disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove).<sup>7</sup> I used public endorsement of a foreign policy action as a proxy for estimating public approval of the Chinese government. In recent years, researchers have been barred from directly measuring public support for

the Chinese government and its leaders. Consequently, more and more surveys and experiments in China now assess public approval of specific government policies instead (See, for example, [Hou and Quek 2018](#); [Quek and Johnston 2018](#)).

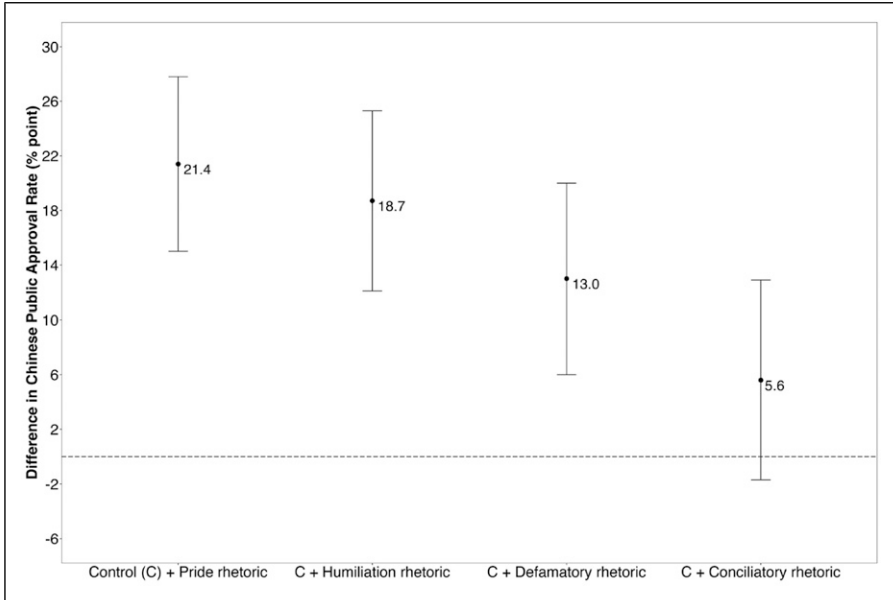
Next, participants were asked the extent to which they supported an aggressive foreign policy toward the U.S. To measure public support for aggressive foreign policy, I ask, “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: China should rely more on military strength to achieve its foreign policy goals toward the U.S.” Agreement is coded 1 if the respondents choose “strongly agree,” “agree,” or “somewhat agree,” and zero otherwise (“strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “somewhat disagree,” or “neither agree nor disagree”).<sup>8</sup>

To delve into the underlying mechanisms of WWD, I assessed how WWD increases the Chinese public’s support for their government by strengthening ingroup favoritism. I also examined how WWD amplifies support for assertive foreign policies by fostering out-group prejudice. This analysis draws upon the survey crafted by [Wang, Johnston, and Wang \(2021\)](#) and [Gries et al. \(2011\)](#), with the specific survey wording provided in the [Appendix \(pages A4–A7\)](#).

To examine how international audiences respond to WWD, I recruited 1, 500 respondents through Lucid, an online platform that quota samples to the U.S. Census benchmarks (e.g., income, education, age, and race), in January 2023. After respondents answered specific demographic questions (e.g., age, education, and gender) and successfully passed two attention check questions, I assigned them randomly to five groups (one control group and four treatment groups). All American respondents read the same vignette as the Chinese respondents. After reading the vignette, the survey measured their support for an aggressive foreign policy toward China. To measure the U.S. public’s support for aggressive foreign policies, I asked the following question: “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The U.S. should rely more on military strength to achieve its foreign policy goals toward China.”<sup>9</sup> To examine the underlying mechanisms that explains international consequences of WWD, the survey measured intergroup threat. I measured the differences between the control group and treatment groups using a simple difference in means test to examine WWD’s domestic and international effects.

## **Experimental Results in China**

Does WWD increase the Chinese public’s support for their government? [Figure 1](#) indicates that the answer is yes. The figure shows the difference in approval rates between the control and each treatment condition. In the baseline condition, 67.3 percent of the respondents approve of the Chinese government’s handling of the situation. When Chinese respondents read about pride rhetoric (Treatment 1), the approval rate increases by 21.4 points, resulting in the shift from 67.3 percent of approval rate to 88.7 percent ( $p < 0.0001$ ). After respondents are exposed to humiliation rhetoric (Treatment 2) and defamatory rhetoric (Treatment 3), approval rate increases by 18.7 percent points ( $p < 0.0001$ ) and 13.0 percent points ( $p = 0.0003$ ).<sup>10,11</sup> Moreover,



**Figure 1.** Plot of average treatment effects on Chinese public approval rate. Note: Plotted values on the y-axis represent the difference in the approval rate between the control group and each treatment group (% point). Error bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

conciliatory rhetoric increases approval rate by 5.6 percent points. However, the difference between conciliatory rhetoric and the baseline condition was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.14$ ). Thus, only wolf warrior rhetoric, rather than any other diplomatic rhetoric, increases the Chinese public’s support for their government.

Supplementary exploratory analysis demonstrates that individuals across varying degrees of right-wing authoritarianism, levels of militant assertiveness, inclinations toward hawkish stances, and levels of liberal ideologies all exhibit analogous expressions of support for the Chinese government (See [Figure A6](#), [A8](#), [A10](#) and [A12](#) in the Appendix).

The results so far have shown strong evidence that WWD increases the Chinese public’s support for their government, but we also want to examine the mechanisms driving these results. I expect that pride discourses, humiliation discourses and defamatory discourses increase the Chinese public’s supporting for their government by strengthening ingroup favoritism. To test this mechanism, I estimated the following two models using ordinary least squares (OLS):

$$\text{Ingroup}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{WWD}_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{1}$$

$$\text{Ingroup}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Pride}_i + \beta_2 \text{Humiliation}_i + \beta_3 \text{Defamation}_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where  $i$  indexes a Chinese citizen.

In Model 1, the “Ingroup” is Chinese citizen  $i$ ’s favoritism toward the ingroup, and the right-hand side variable is the WWD treatment. In this model, if respondents received any one of WWD treatments (humiliation, pride, or defamatory rhetoric), then WWD equals to 1, otherwise 0. In other words, I compared the ingroup favoritism between the subjects in the control condition and the subjects exposed to wolf-warrior rhetoric. In total, 300 subjects are included in the control condition, and 901 subjects received wolf-warrior rhetoric. In Model 2, the right-hand side variables are three different types of wolf-warrior rhetoric (pride, humiliation, and defamatory rhetoric).

Figure 2 shows the effects of “wolf warrior” rhetoric on the Chinese public’s ingroup favoritism.<sup>12</sup> As illustrated in Figure 2, the result of Model 1 reveals that WWD in general increases the Chinese public’s ingroup favoritism ( $p = 0.004$ ). In Model 2, pride and humiliation and pride rhetoric also increase the Chinese public’s ingroup favoritism ( $p = 0.015$  in pride rhetoric and  $p = 0.008$  in humiliation rhetoric). While defamatory rhetoric increases the Chinese public’s ingroup favoritism, this effect does not reach conventional significance levels ( $p = 0.051$ ). Overall, the mechanism evaluation offers some evidence to support my theoretical expectations.<sup>13</sup>

Are Chinese citizens more likely to support aggressive foreign policy after they are exposed to wolf warrior rhetoric? Figure 3 displays the difference in public support for

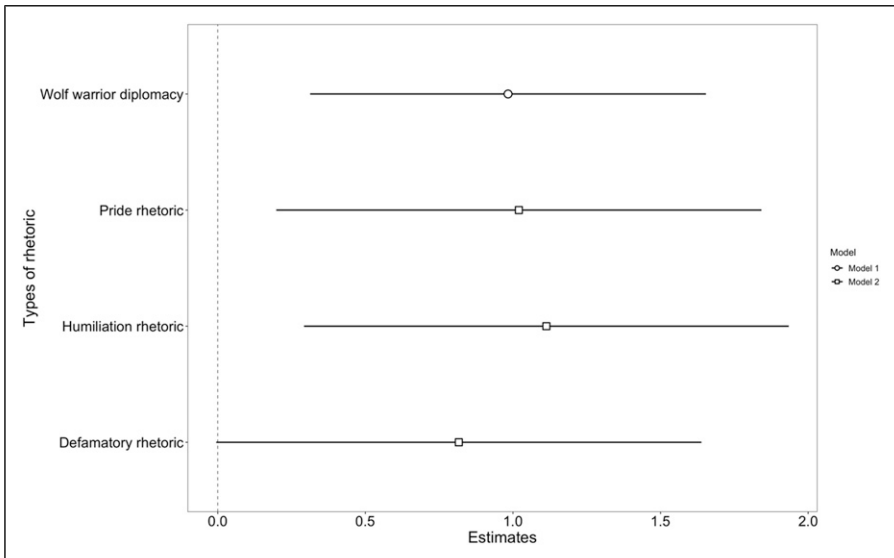
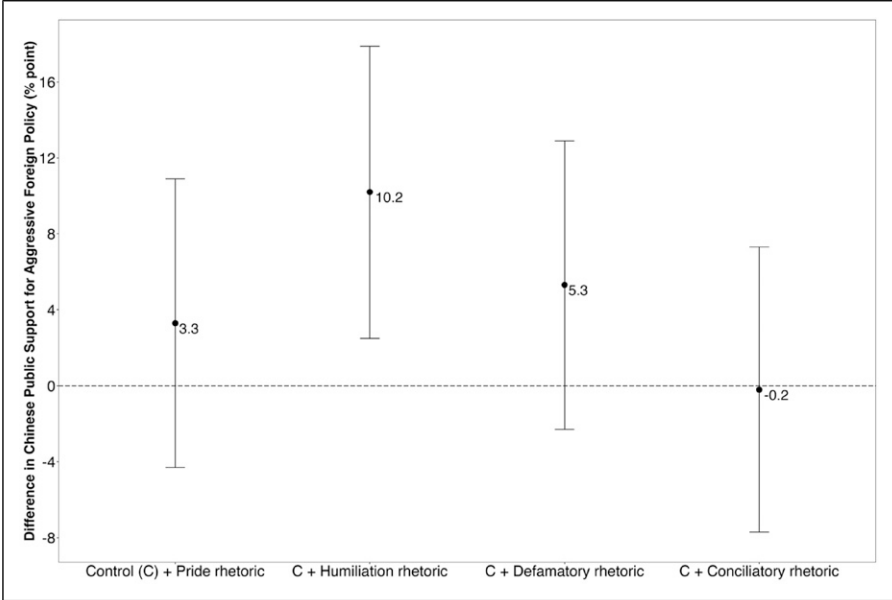


Figure 2. The effects of “wolf-warrior” rhetoric on the Chinese Public’s Ingroup favoritism (95 Percent confidence intervals).



**Figure 3.** Plot of average treatment effects on Chinese public support for aggressive foreign policy toward the U.S. *Note:* Plotted values on the y-axis represent the difference in Chinese public support for aggressive policy toward the U.S. between the control group and each treatment group (% point). Error bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

aggressive foreign policy between the control and each treatment condition. In the baseline condition, 32.0 percent of respondents supported a more assertive foreign policy toward the U.S. public support for assertive foreign policy rises by 3.3% points in the pride treatment condition ( $p = 0.39$ ), 10.2% points in the humiliation treatment condition ( $p = 0.009$ ), and 5.3% points in the defamatory treatment condition ( $p = 0.175$ ). The findings from the seven-point scale approval ratings align with the results obtained from the percentage approval measurements.<sup>14</sup> Finally, I ran regressions on the outcome variables of approval score and the Chinese public’s support for aggressive foreign policy, controlling for respondents’ demographic characteristics. Our conclusions remain robust across different specifications ([Appendix Tables A1–A3](#)).

I also examined the mechanism that drives the Chinese public’s support for aggressive foreign policy. To test this mechanism, I estimate the following two models using OLS:

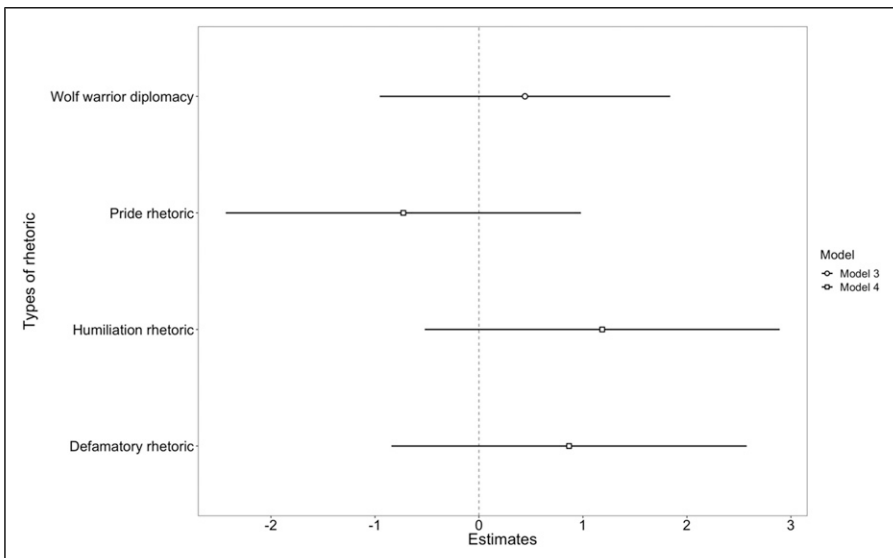
$$\text{Outgroup}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{WWD}_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{3}$$

$$\text{Outgroup}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Pride}_i + \beta_2 \text{Humiliation}_i + \beta_3 \text{Defamation}_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{4}$$

where  $i$  indexes a Chinese citizen.

In Model 3, the “Outgroup” is Chinese citizen  $i$ ’s bias toward out-groups, and the right-hand side variable is the WWD treatment. In Model 4, the right-hand side variables are three different types of wolf-warrior rhetoric (pride, humiliation, and defamatory rhetoric). As Figure 4 shows, humiliation and defamatory rhetoric increases the Chinese public’s bias against the U.S., but neither of them achieves the statistically significant level ( $p = 0.17$  in humiliation condition and  $p = 0.32$  in defamatory condition). The mediation analysis results presented in Figure A4 of the Appendix are consistent with the mechanism test outcomes.

In summary, the use of pride, humiliation, defamatory rhetoric by Chinese leaders leads to an increase in the approval rating for the Chinese government. Among the three types of wolf warrior rhetoric, pride rhetoric has the largest effect in absolute terms on public support for the regime, but it does not necessarily lead to more support for hawkish foreign policies. Of greater interest, I fail to find evidence that conciliatory rhetoric, which is adapted from the Chinese diplomats’ responses to the U.S. criticism of Chinese human rights issues in 2006, is effective in earning the Chinese public’s support for their government. These results imply that Chinese leaders may persist in using wolf warrior rhetoric to garner domestic support and uphold national unity, particularly as long as the U.S. continues to criticize Chinese foreign policy and human rights violations.



**Figure 4.** The effects of “wolf-warrior” rhetoric on the Chinese public’s outgroup prejudice toward the U.S. (95 Percent confidence intervals).

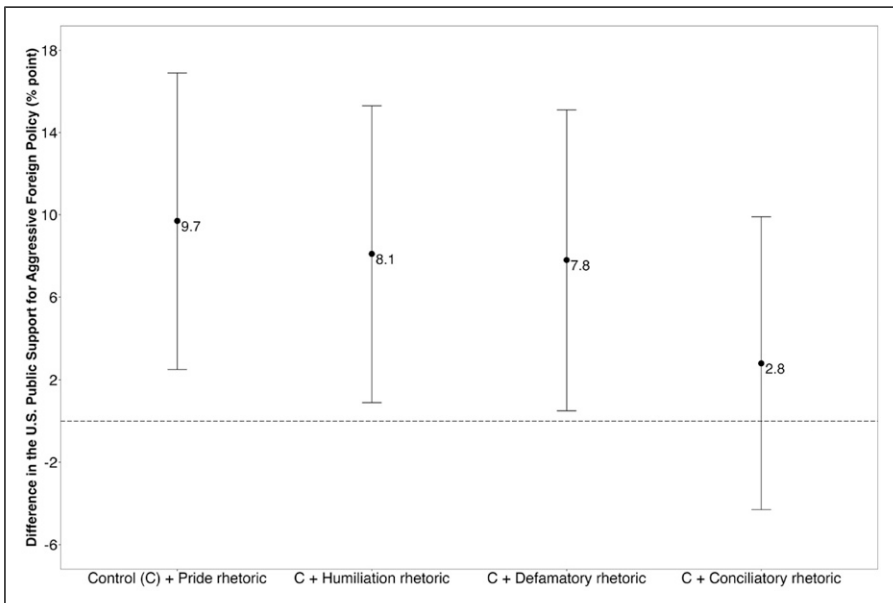


## Experimental Results in the US

Does WWD increase the U.S. public's support for hostile foreign policies toward China? [Figure 5](#) suggests it does. [Figure 5](#) displays the difference in public support for aggressive foreign policy between the control and each treatment condition. In the baseline condition, 24.7 percent of respondents support a more assertive foreign policy toward China. Public support for assertive foreign policy increases by 9.7% points in the pride treatment condition ( $p = 0.009$ ), 8.1% points in the humiliation treatment condition ( $p = 0.028$ ), 7.8% points in the defamatory treatment condition ( $p = 0.035$ ), and 2.8% points in the conciliatory treatment condition ( $p = 0.45$ ). The results based on the seven-point scale approval ratings align with the results obtained from the percentage approval measurements.<sup>15</sup>

Overall, our experimental results show that the U.S. public adopted a more hawkish stance toward China when they were exposed to WWD. Our conclusions remain robust when controlling for respondents' demographic characteristics in regressions on the U.S. public's support for aggressive foreign policy ([Appendix Table A7](#)).

Interestingly, humiliation rhetoric has a significant effect on the public support for aggressive foreign policy toward China among the U.S. public, which is contrary to my



**Figure 5.** Plot of average treatment effects on the U.S. public support for aggressive foreign policy toward the China. *Note:* Plotted values on the y-axis represent the difference in U.S. public support for aggressive policy toward the China between the control group and each treatment group (% point). Error bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

expectation. This intriguing discovery could be ascribed to the potential scenario where the U.S. public might not fully empathize with the Chinese public’s sentiments of humiliation; rather, they could acknowledge the potential for humiliated nations to harbor inclinations for revenge or retaliation. To summarize, while WWD increases domestic security for the Chinese government, this domestic benefit comes at the cost of international hostility. WWD antagonizes the U.S. public and further motivates them to support aggressive foreign policies toward China.

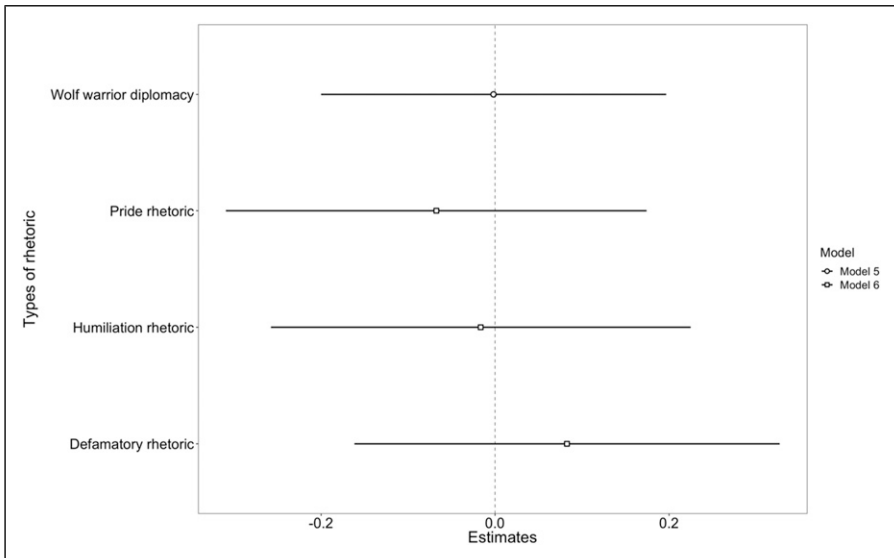
I also examined the mechanism that drives the U.S. public’s support for aggressive foreign policy toward China. To test this mechanism, I estimate the following two models using OLS:

$$\text{Threat}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{WWD}_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{5}$$

$$\text{Threat}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Pride}_i + \beta_2 \text{Humiliation}_i + \beta_3 \text{Defamation}_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{6}$$

where *i* indexes a U.S. citizen.

In Model 5, “Threat” is the U.S. public’s perception of China as a threat, and the right-hand side variable is WWD treatment. In Model 6, the right-hand side variables are three different types of wolf-warrior rhetoric (pride, humiliation, and defamatory rhetoric). [Figure 6](#) shows that, surprisingly, WWD does not reinforce the U.S. public’s perception of China as a threat. Future research should explore how WWD motivates



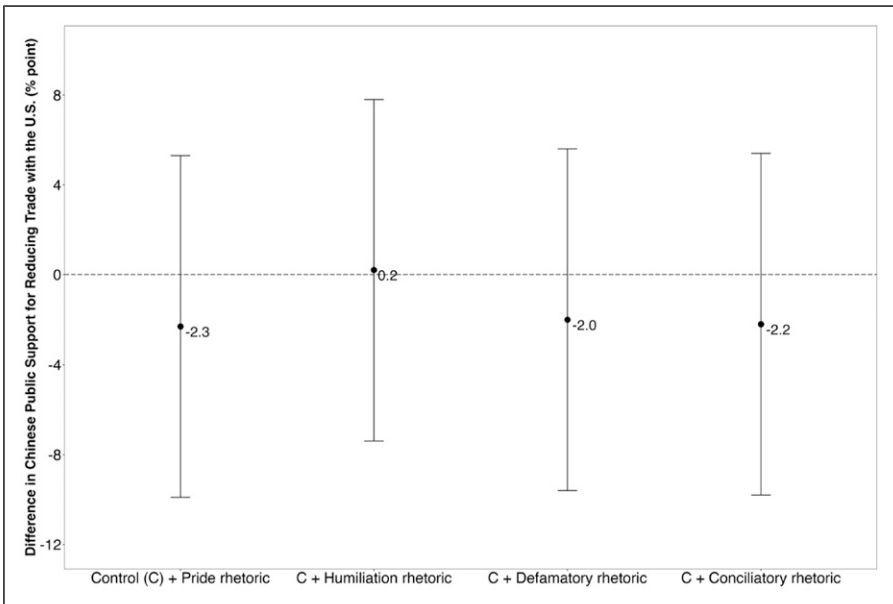
**Figure 6.** The effects of “wolf-warrior” rhetoric on the U.S. public’s perception of China as a threat (95 Percent confidence intervals).

the U.S. public to support aggressive foreign policies toward China. [Figure A5](#) in the Appendix shows the effects of WWD on the perceived intergroup threat among the U.S. public in mediation analyses.

### Empirical Scope Conditions

While WWD is generally provocative, my experiment suggests there may be important scope conditions on this effect. I find that the public is less supportive of confrontational policies when reminded that such policies carry costs. Respondents were asked: “To what extent do you approve or disapprove of the following potential action by the Chinese government: Significantly reduce trade between the U.S. and China, even if this leads to greater costs for Chinese consumers.”

I focus on the results of raw percentage approval. Approval coded 1 if the respondents choose “strongly approve,” “approve,” or “somewhat approve,” and zero otherwise (“strongly disapprove,” “disapprove,” “somewhat disapprove,” or “neither approve nor disapprove”). [Figure 7](#) illustrates the difference in public support for reducing trade between the control and treatment conditions in China. Notably, none of the three types of WWD increases Chinese public support for reducing trade with the

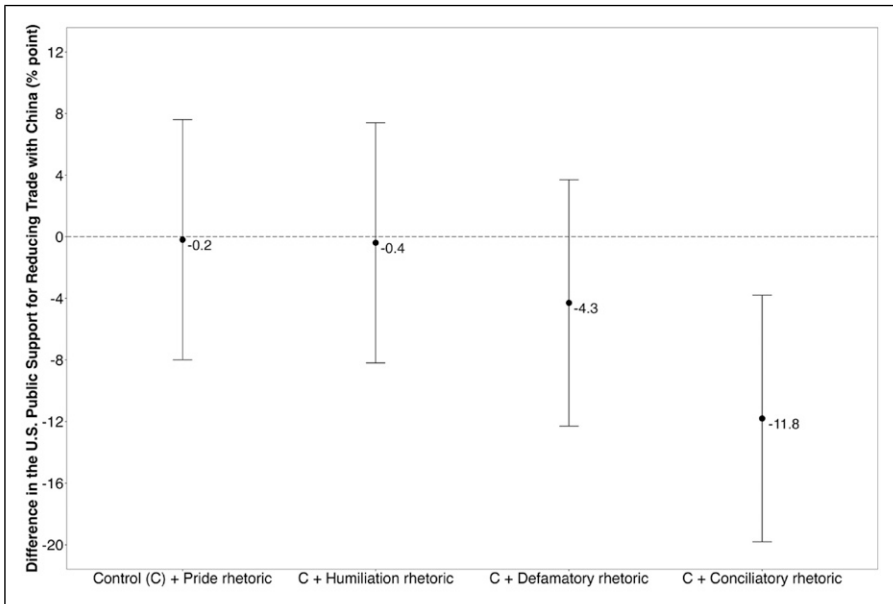


**Figure 7.** Plot of average treatment effects on Chinese public support for reducing trade with the U.S. Note: Plotted values on the y-axis represent the difference in Chinese public support for reducing trade with the U.S. between the control group and each treatment group (% point). Error bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

U.S. when they are informed that such trade policies impose greater costs on Chinese consumers. In the baseline condition, 35 percent of respondents expressed support for reducing trade between the U.S. and China. Chinese public support for this trade policy experienced a decline of 2.3% points in the pride treatment condition ( $p = 0.55$ ), an increase of 0.2% points in the humiliation treatment condition ( $p = 0.96$ ), a decrease of 2.0% points in the defamatory treatment condition ( $p = 0.60$ ), and a decrease of 2.2% points in the conciliatory treatment condition ( $p = 0.57$ ).

A similar pattern emerges in the U.S. survey. WWD fails to enhance support for reducing trade with China among American respondents when they recognize a higher cost associated with U.S. consumers (See Figure 8). In the baseline condition, 59.9 percent of American respondents express support for reducing trade between the U.S. and China. The U.S. public support for this trade policy decreases 0.2% points in the pride treatment condition ( $p = 0.97$ ), decreases 0.4% points in the humiliation treatment condition ( $p = 0.92$ ), decreases 4.3% points in the defamatory treatment condition ( $p = 0.29$ ), but experiences a significant decrease of 11.8% points in the conciliatory treatment condition ( $p = 0.004$ ).

Overall, these results suggest that the negative influences of WWD on U.S.-China relations are constrained by the public's perception of costs. While both American and



**Figure 8.** Plot of average treatment effects on the U.S. public support for reducing trade with China. Note: Plotted values on the y-axis represent the difference in the U.S. public support for reducing trade with China between the control group and each treatment group (% point). Error bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Chinese citizens may express hostility toward each other under the influence of wolf-warrior rhetoric, they may also reconsider confrontational policies when they realize that WWD undermines their national interests.

Indeed, Chinese leaders employ a similar strategy when addressing domestic protests. For instance, Weiss (2014) demonstrates that Chinese leaders permit domestic protests to signal resolve in foreign affairs and reaffirm commitment to safeguarding national interests. However, they may also suppress protests when seeking to foster international cooperation. Likewise, WWD can serve as a tool for Chinese leaders to signal resolve and a tough stance. Yet, when the Chinese government prioritizes international cooperation, Beijing can underscore the costs of confrontational policies, thereby shaping domestic public opinion and tempering nationalist preferences for a hardline stance. The timing and strategic use of WWD largely depend on specific scenarios.

## Conclusion

This paper asks two questions. First, does WWD increase Chinese domestic support for the Chinese government and, if so, through what mechanisms does it shape public opinion? Second, how do international audiences interpret and respond to WWD? I proposed parallel survey experiments to answer these two questions. The experimental results show that WWD succeeds in mobilizing substantial domestic public support for the Chinese government, but these political benefits to Chinese leaders comes at the cost of international backlash. One of the primary drawbacks of WWD is its tendency to provoke public opinion abroad, leading to increased hostility toward China among international audiences. All three types of rhetoric—pride, humiliation, and defamatory rhetoric—shape the U.S. public's preference for aggressive foreign policies toward China.

The trade-off between preserving domestic stability and triggering international hostility carries interesting theoretical and policy implications regarding international diplomacy and domestic politics. Theoretically, a two-level game suggests that the credibility of information conveyed to foreign audiences can be influenced by domestic institutes and audiences (Putnam 1988). However, in the context of diplomatic endeavors on a global scale, the primary audience with whom leaders aim to resolve information asymmetries may at times be their own domestic public, rather than foreign states.

The experimental findings further demonstrate that Chinese leaders derive limited advantages from employing conciliatory rhetoric. Adopting a conciliatory approach, however, could help prevent tensions between the U.S. and China from escalating because conciliatory rhetoric does not trigger antagonism in the U.S. Particularly intriguing, my survey also reveals that the negative consequences of WWD on U.S.-China relations are not boundless in scope. While both American and Chinese citizens support hawkish foreign policy stances by their respective countries upon hearing WWD rhetoric, they also express a reluctance to harm their economic relations. These

results give us a glimmer of hope for U.S.–China relations. If citizens from both countries are inclined to prioritize economic connections despite their backing of assertive foreign policies, there exists a potential avenue for identifying common ground between the two states.

Based on these implications, future work could theorize and test the conditions under which diplomatic rhetoric can reduce animosity between states while minimizing the negative impact on their domestic audience. The mutual differentiation model suggests promoting positive intergroup experiences by arranging contact situations where each group assumes distinct yet complementary roles toward shared objectives (Hewstone and Brown 1986). This approach enables different nations to pursue common goals through a division of labor among collaborating groups, distinguishing and coordinating their activities into separate yet complementary roles. To alleviate hostility between the U.S. and China, national leaders can underscore the mutually beneficial economic roles that both countries play within the global supply chain.

Moreover, future research could explore the transmission and coverage of WWD in Chinese and American newspaper outlets to investigate the domestic and international consequences it may yield. While WWD is emerging as a newly prominent term characterizing Chinese foreign policy in global media, narratives revolving around the “Century of Humiliation” and concepts of national pride have served as enduring instruments of domestic propaganda, bolstering the CCP legitimacy across an extended time frame (Huang 2018; Mattingly and Yao 2022; Wang 2008). However, when these same rhetorical strategies are employed by diplomats, their impact transcends national boundaries and resonates throughout the international media sphere.

Simultaneously, it is important to acknowledge that the impacts of wolf warrior rhetoric, both domestically and internationally, can vary over timeframes and among diverse audiences. These differences are influenced by how these rhetorical messages are communicated through different media channels, intricately tied to prevailing meta-perceptions and narratives held by respondents and audiences. For instance, the adverse impacts of WWD on the U.S. public could also arise from the escalating tensions between the U.S. and China within the framework of great power competition.

While my experiment finds that WWD influences the Chinese public’s backing of their government by reinforcing their ingroup favoritism, other mechanisms could be operating. For instance, Carter and Carter (2024) demonstrate that Chinese propaganda concerning domestic politics triggers fear among respondents and therefore, broadcasting outgroup repression signals the regime’s capability for domestic violence. Likewise, international diplomacy, ostensibly targeting global audiences, may function as a form of domestic propaganda, eliciting increased support for the Chinese government by signaling a preferred confrontational foreign policy. In future studies, researchers could employ list-experiments to explore whether international diplomacy operates similarly to domestic propaganda among the public to enhance domestic security.

Finally, future research could explore whether the Chinese public’s endorsement of WWD varies in response to different diplomatic contexts and the evolving course of

U.S.-China relations. For instance, the Chinese public's increased support for WWD might become apparent when Chinese diplomats counter U.S. allegations of Chinese human rights violations, as depicted in my survey vignette. However, would such support remain consistent if Chinese diplomats were to initiate a dispute with the U.S. government? These intriguing questions pave the way for future investigations of the dual effects of WWD.

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### **Data Availability Statement**

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article and <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/B3HYXW>.

### **Supplemental Material**

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

### **Notes**

1. Similar definitions of WWD can be found in the following papers and news media: [Sullivan and Wang \(2022\)](#) and [Mattingly and Sundquist \(2023\)](#).
2. The concepts of ingroup bias and outgroup prejudice are similar to the concepts of patriotism and nationalism in the political science literature. For example, [Quek and Johnston \(2018\)](#),

- 30) argue that nationalism “includes basic favorable attitudes toward the national in-group, but it also includes a more nativist element that is strongly attached to country and territory and that denigrates outsiders.” Likewise, other scholars contend that “patriotism is an in-group attitude that conveys positive feelings about one’s own nation and conationals” whereas nationalism “includes an attachment to the nation (as does patriotism) but spills over into animosity toward outsiders (de Figueiredo and Elkins 2003, 175).
3. Examples of WWD can be found on page A37–38 in the Appendix.
  4. Xi (2021) argued that “After the Opium War of 1840, however, China was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society and suffered greater ravages than ever before. The country endured intense humiliation, the people were subjected to great pain, and the Chinese civilization was plunged into darkness... Since the very day of its founding, the Party has made seeking happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation its aspiration and mission. All the struggle, sacrifice, and creation through which the Party has united and led the Chinese people over the past hundred years has been tied together by one ultimate theme-bringing about the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”
  5. See my pre-registration report at: [https://osf.io/5dyvz/?view\\_only=265eac10ef254a259d875aab833ffba4](https://osf.io/5dyvz/?view_only=265eac10ef254a259d875aab833ffba4). The data replication materials can be found at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/B3HYXW>.
  6. Before proceeding to the experimental vignette, participants are required to respond to two attention questions. Failure to answer these questions correctly renders participants ineligible for compensation and consequently excludes them from the experiments.
  7. Respondents were asked “Do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the way China handled the situation?” The first question gives us the raw percentage of respondents who approved (disapproved) of the leader’s action. In the second question, respondents who answered “approve” (“disapprove”) in the first question were asked how strongly they approve (disapprove). Those who answered “neither approve nor disapprove” were asked if they leaned toward approving or disapproving, or if they leaned neither way. Answers to the two questions generate an approval rating on a 7-point scale from 1 (strong disapproval) to 7 (strong approval). I report both the approval rating (see Table A2 in the Appendix) and the raw percentage of respondents who approved of the leader’s action (Figure 1 in the manuscript). Comprehensive survey wordings can be referenced on pages A2 to A7 in the Appendix.
  8. In my pre-analysis plan, I did not specify whether I would report results using the raw percentage approval rate or the 7-point Likert scale for this particular outcome variable. Both coding strategies produce identical results. For consistency, the raw percentage approval is presented in the main text of the paper.
  9. I also conducted the second U.S. survey which was administrated by Cooperative Election Study (CES). I report the results of CES in the appendix. This question is exclusively included in the Lucid survey and is not part of the CES survey.
  10. All tests are two-tailed tests of proportion for percentage differences or two-tailed t-tests for numerical score differences.
  11. I focus on percentage approval, which is more intuitive, but similar inferences are obtained with the seven-point approval score. The results based on the seven-point approval score



- yield even smaller  $p$ -values than those based on the approval percentage, indicating stronger treatment effects (Appendix Table A2).
12. Although similar mechanism testing has been employed in political science research (Blair et al., 2021; Ravanilla, Haim, and Hicken 2022) and the testing contributes to our understanding of the mechanisms underlying WWD, it is worth mentioning two caveats when interpreting these results. First, distinguishing between a mechanism and an outcome in a survey is challenging. Second, because the mechanisms are not randomized, I cannot discount the possibility of other mechanisms explaining higher support for the Chinese government.
  13. In the Appendix, I present results of a mediation analysis proposed by Imai et al. (2011). Overall, the results align with those obtained from mechanism tests. Nevertheless, we should be careful about drawing strong conclusions on the effects of these mediators because this mediation analysis relies on the strong assumption of sequential ignorability.
  14. Here I report the Chinese public's support for aggressive foreign policies toward the U.S. in the control and treatment conditions on a seven-point scale (1 = "strongly disapprove"; 7 = "strongly approve"), with 4 as the midpoint ("neither approve nor disapprove). When respondents were exposed to pride, humiliation, and defamatory rhetoric, their approval ratings for aggressive foreign policies toward the U.S. increased from 3.97 in the control group to 4.12 ( $p = 0.17$ ), 4.32 ( $p = 0.0018$ ), and 4.17 ( $p = 0.07$ ), respectively. The approval rating for aggressive foreign policies remained at 3.99 when participants received conciliatory rhetoric ( $p = 0.87$ ).
  15. Here I report the U.S. public's support for adopting aggressive foreign policies toward China in the control and treatment conditions on a seven-point scale (1 = "strongly disapprove"; 7 = "strongly approve"), with 4 as the midpoint ("neither approve nor disapprove). In the control group, the approval rating for using military strength to achieve U.S. foreign policy goals vis-a-vis China was 3.40. But this approval rating increased to 3.76 ( $p = 0.007$ ), 3.90 ( $p = 0.0002$ ), and 3.74 ( $p = 0.01$ ) in pride rhetoric, humiliation rhetoric, and defamatory rhetoric treatment groups, respectively. The approval rating was 3.49 when respondents were exposed to conciliatory rhetoric treatment ( $p = 0.50$ ).

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