Bipartisanship in the Shadow of China's Threat:

The Effect of External Threats on Internal Unity in the U.S. Congress

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Abstract: In recent years, political analysts and media observers claim that taking a harder line against China has become one of the few remaining bipartisan issues left in a highly partisan U.S. Congress. However, a closer look at China-related bills and resolutions reveals significant variation in the level of bipartisan support they receive. While some China-related legislation receives support from both Democratic and Republican lawmakers, others are supported by members of only one party. Under what conditions can Democrats and Republicans collaborate to deal with threats posed by China? In this Research Note, we examine two conditions under which the two parties jointly support a China-related measure. First, the proposed legislation is not related to U.S. domestic affairs. Second, if the legislation is related to U.S. domestic affairs, neither party claims the ownership of the issue addressed by the legislation. We created and analyzed a novel dataset that encompasses China-related legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives between 2009 and 2022. Our empirical results show that bipartisan collaboration on China's threats depends on the nature of the issue.

Keyword: China's Threats, U.S.-China Relations, U.S. Congress, and Issue Ownership

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I. Introduction

In recent years, analysts and observers claim that taking a harder line against China has become one of few remaining bipartisan issues left in a highly partisan U.S. Congress. Indeed, many China-related bills received bipartisan support and passed Congress without objection, such as The Hong Kong Autonomy Act in 2020, which imposes sanctions on individuals and entities that contribute to China's failure to preserve Hong Kong's autonomy, and bills supporting Taiwan's participation in international organizations. These measures reflect lawmakers' efforts to address the ideological challenges posed by China. Likewise, to counter Beijing's technological assertiveness, especially on semiconductors, Democrats and Republicans achieved an unusual consensus on the United States Innovation and Competition Act in 2021. As Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer stated: "On the China bill, we have good bipartisan support." This sentiment was mirrored by Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who remarked: "If any issue is ripe for a regular-order bipartisan process, it is this one [the China issue]" (Sarlin and Kapur 2021).

However, some other China-related measures received support from only one party. For instance, the Stop China's IP Theft Act in 2021, which seeks to preventing senior Chinese Communist Party officials from entering the U.S. with an emphasis of national security threats posed by China, only received backing from Republicans. *Given that all these measures underscore the threats posed by China, why do some attract support from both parties while others receive backing only from one party*? More broadly, we seek to understand the circumstances under which the Democrats and Republicans can collaborate to address external threats.

Many IR scholars argue that external threats mitigate internal divisions (Brody 1991; Mueller 1973). However, we challenge the prevailing argument that external threats inherently heal

partisan divisions and reduce polarization. Instead, we contend that domestic elites, despite bipartisan acknowledgment of China as a national security threat, do not necessarily cooperate to address these threats. We argue that the likelihood of bipartisan unity in response to an external threat is closely tied to domestic competition. Drawing on the issue ownership literature in American Politics (e.g., Petrocik 1996; Green and Jennings 2019; Egan 2013; Stubager 2018; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003), we argue that bipartisanship is more likely to occur under two conditions: (1) domestic issues are not involved, or (2) neither party declares ownership of the domestic issue addressed by the legislation.

We define "issue ownership" as a condition where a party has claimed "the greatest level of public trust, association, and a reputation for [its] competence" in dealing with a specific issue (Green and Jennings 2019, 445). We expect that a China-related measure is least likely to garner bipartisan support when it pertains to an issue that at least one party claims ownership of. In such cases, addressing the China threats is overshadowed by domestic rivalry, because lawmakers from both parties attempt to strengthen their own associations with the issue while avoiding any acknowledgement of the opposing party's competence. For instance, when Democratic legislators propose China-related measures on issues like environmental policy or taxation — issues where one or both parties have claimed ownership — Republicans may hesitate to support these measures, as doing so will enhance the Democrats' political capital and undermine the Republicans' own reputation on these issues.

We tested our hypotheses using an original dataset that encompasses China-related legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives from the 111th to 117th Congress (2009-2022), a period when China is increasingly being perceived as a threat to the U.S. national interests. The results support our expectations, showing that China-related legislation is more likely to become highly partisan

when it relates to U.S. domestic affairs. In particular, those measures that address issues that one or both parties claim ownership of are the least likely to receive bipartisan support. Our results underscore the significant role of domestic partisan competition for issue ownership in shaping U.S. foreign policy towards China.

This Research Note makes three major contributions to the study of U.S.-China relations and the influence of domestic politics on foreign policy. First, the existing literature on the effect of external threats on domestic cohesion suggests that such threats can inherently bridge domestic divides in the U.S. (e.g., Brody 1991; Desch 1996; Fordham 1998; Gowa 1998), particularly when the threats, such as those posed by China, are persistent and conspicuous (e.g., Bafumi and Parent 2012). However, rather than treating China policy as a monolithic issue, this paper demonstrates that approaches to addressing China threats vary significantly depending on the specific issue areas involved. When a measure disproportionately benefits one party, bipartisan cooperation often gives way to partisan competition, even when national security is at stake. By focusing on elite behavior on Capitol Hill, this paper provides new insights into the conditions under which lawmakers might cooperate to address external threats. It also contributes to the growing body of experimental research in American politics, which suggests that external threats may fail to unify Americans due to the partisan filtering of elite communication in today's hyperpolarized climate (Myrick 2021; Barber and Pope 2019).

Second, this Research Note provides empirical evidence how the U.S. domestic politics influences U.S.-China relations. While a significant portion of current literature leans towards a structural approach, attributing U.S.-China tensions to shifts in power (e.g., Allison 2018; Tammen et al. 2000), our results show that these tensions can also arise from political elites strategically leveraging legislation for domestic political ends. This institutional perspective at the domestic

level complements prevailing structural interpretations of the roots of great power rivalry.

Finally, this study presents an original dataset on China-related legislation introduced in the House of Representatives to better understand the dynamics of U.S.-China relations. Previous research primarily focuses on measures that received roll-call votes (e.g., Nokken 2003; Kuk, Seligsohn, and Zhang 2018; Xie 2009). However, those measures represent only a small subset of all proposals related to China and may bias the conclusion. Lawmakers could come together to denounce an adversary for human rights violations by passing an expressive resolution, while maintaining divergent perspectives on specific concrete foreign policy actions against the same adversary (Myrick 2021). Confining the analysis solely to roll-call votes might result in a misinformed inference that there were no partisan differences surrounding the issue. To address this limitation, we examine the proportion of Democratic and Republican cosponsors of each China-related legislation. Bill cosponsorship coalitions provides lawmakers "the opportunity to take a position and indicate policy agreement with a coalition of other members" and allow members to "take positions on more issues than just those that receive roll call votes" (Harbridge 2015, 24). Therefore, our study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how U.S. domestic politics influences the policy towards China.

II. Domestic versus international affairs in China-related measures

China-related measures in U.S. Congress cover an extensive range of issues, such as security, human rights, trade, and technology. Drawing from the literature on U.S. foreign policy and American Politics, we argue that the level of bipartisan support China-related legislation receives is related to two factors: (1) whether the measure addresses an issue related to U.S. domestic affairs; and (2) if the measure is related to U.S. domestic affairs, the party ownership of the issue that the measure deals with.

(1) International affairs in China-related measures

Certain issues in China-related legislation, such as those pertaining to Chinese human rights, exhibit limited connections with U.S. domestic affairs, falling under the category of "international affairs." According to Congress.gov, legislation related to international affairs is distinct from that concerning domestic affairs.[1] Within the realm of "international affairs", the primary focus of measures encompasses issues related to "foreign aid, human rights, international law, and organizations; national governance; arms control; diplomacy and foreign officials; alliances and collective security."

Scholars posit three explanations for why legislation dealing with these international affairs is more likely to receive bipartisan support. First, these issues do not neatly align with a simple left-right spectrum, and both the public and elites are thus less likely to engage in intense partisan debates. This diminished ideological division gives lawmakers greater flexibility to collaborate on these issues (Tama 2023; Kertzer, Brooks, and Brooks 2021).

Second, many advocacy groups on international affairs either exhibit lower levels of activity or maintain strong ties with members from both parties (Tama 2023). This diminishes the incentive for members of Congress to participate in partisan debates and creates room for bipartisan collaboration.

Third, regular elections in democracies lead to a "partisan truce" in dealing with international affairs wherein both parties pledge to and implement a moderate foreign policy agenda (Alesina 1988; Gowa 1998) because maintaining commitments to foreign partners requires long-term consistency in foreign policy (Chaudoin, Milner, and Tingley 2010). The U.S. would struggle to establish credible commitments to its partners if the governing party changed its foreign policies

[1] For the full list of policy area terms, see https://www.congress.gov/help/field-values/policy-area.

with each transition of power. Therefore, a prolonged national commitment is essential for a strategy of global involvement through multilateral cooperation. Upon assuming power, all political parties must be steadfast in adhering to the fundamental principles of American foreign policy orientation (Chaudoin, Milner, and Tingley 2010). In other words, this commitment stems from the acknowledgment by national leaders of the inevitability of party alternation and the imperative of maintaining steadfast, long-term commitments to their international partners in international affairs. Therefore, we propose that:

Hypothesis 1: China-related measures that address U.S. domestic affairs are less likely to receive bipartisan support compared to China-related measures that address international affairs.

(2) U.S. domestic affairs in China-related measures

When a China-related measure is related to U.S. domestic affairs (e.g., Chinese investment in the U.S. or Confucius Institutes at U.S. universities), China's threat often takes a backseat to domestic competition. In this scenario, the extent of bipartisan support on these measures is contingent on the claimed party ownership of the issue that these measures address. Specifically, we contend that China-related measures are more likely to receive bipartisan support when they address issues neither party claims ownership of, followed by measures dealing with issues at least one party claims ownership of.

In this Research Note, we define "issue ownership" as a condition where a party has established "the greatest level of public trust, association, and a reputation for [its] competence" in dealing with a specific issue (Green and Jennings 2019, 445). When a party owns an issue, it has a better reputation for handling it than the other party, and this positive perception endures

over time (Egan 2013; Adams 1997; Banda 2021). In other words, that issue becomes the party's brand. For example, the Democratic Party is seen as better able to handle issues related to the environment and healthcare, while the Republican Party is seen more competent on the issues of crime and national defense. During election campaigns, candidates concentrate on issues perceived as their areas of strength to enhance their chances of being elected (Green and Jennings 2019; Green-Pedersen 2007). After securing an election victory, legislators bolster their party's reputation by promoting issues that are seen as their party's strengths or areas of expertise in the legislative agenda (Green-Pedersen 2007).

Party branding is crucial not only for the party as a whole but also for rank-and-file legislators during election campaigns and after they take office. By centering their focus on issues where their party has a strong reputation, candidates significantly increase their chances of electoral success for two key reasons. First, candidates can send strong signals to their core constituents, demonstrating their sincerity and commitment to advancing the party's policy agenda (Petrocik 1996; Rabinowitz and MacDonald 1989). Second, they can prime and frame the importance of specific issues during campaigns, thereby influencing voting behaviors. As Petrocik (1996) notes, "The theory of issue ownership finds a campaign effect when a candidate successfully frames the vote choice as a decision to be made in terms of problems facing the country that he is better able to 'handle' than his opponent… Once the agenda of the election is settled, reinforced partisans, defectors, and swing voters tilt the outcome in favor of the candidate advantaged by the agenda" (826-830). For instance, focusing on issues like abortion and social welfare can reinforce Democratic loyalty, and cause a shift toward the Democrats among independent voters. This shift reduces the likelihood of GOP candidates being elected by diverting public attention from immigration and crime – issues where the GOP holds a stronger reputation.

Moreover, existing research demonstrates the strong connection between campaign and legislative arenas. Legislators are strongly motivated to make sincere appeals during campaigns and to prioritize these issues once they assume office (Sulkin 2009). Given that re-election is a top priority for legislators (Mayhew 1974), promoting and consistently advancing the issues emphasized in their campaigns enhances their chances of re-election by signaling their commitment to future legislative action. In sum, rank-and-file legislators adhere to the partisan priorities they establish during campaigns and are deeply invested in issue ownership both before and after election campaigns (Egan 2013; Sulkin 2009).

We anticipate that when China-related measures are connected to U.S. domestic affairs, the likelihood of bipartisan support for these measures depends on which party claims ownership of the issue the measure addresses. A bill advocating for China to enhance its environmental protection initiatives might not garner substantial backing from Republican lawmakers, because this issue is strongly associated with the Democrats and represents their brand. For Republicans, supporting Democrats in enacting such a policy might further strengthen the long-term and stable association between the Democratic Party and that specific issue in voters' minds, potentially providing the Democratic Party with additional political capital to tout. The same logic holds when Democrats consider supporting issues predominantly associated with Republicans. Some other China-related measures address issues both parties claim ownership of (i.e., taxation, economy, and public finance. See Table 1 on page 17). For these issues, both parties are perceived by a segment of voters as better equipped to handle these issues. We argue that like those issues claimed by one party, China-related measures that address issues claimed by both parties are similarly unlikely to receive bipartisan support. This is because lawmakers from both parties aim to strengthen their connections with these issues while refraining from acknowledging the other

party's superior ability to handle them. To sum up, we anticipate that bipartisan cooperation on China-related bills often gives way to partisan competition in domestic affairs, even when national security is at stake.

In comparison, when a China-related measure addresses an issue neither party claims ownership of, it is more likely to gain bipartisan support. For both Democrats and Republicans, supporting those bills address threats from China but without bolstering their opponents' track record. This is evident in the recent bipartisan consensus in Congress on banning TikTok. As Table 1 (page 17) indicates, neither party has sole ownership over issues concerning technology and communication. If this policy is enacted, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans can unilaterally benefit from it. Therefore, for measures related to U.S. domestic affairs, we propose that:

Hypothesis 2: China-related measures that address issues neither party claims ownership of are more likely to receive bipartisan support compared to China-related measures addressing issues that one or two parties claim ownership of.

III. Research Design

(1) Data

To test our hypotheses, we conducted an analysis of all the legislation introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives that addressed China's perceived threats from 2009-2022. Our data selection process is based on the following procedure. First, we applied two filters in "Advanced Search" on Congress.gov: "Congress" (111^{th}-117^{th}, 2009-2022) and "legislation type" ("All House").[2] The reason we focused on this period is the U.S. adopted a more conciliatory approach

[2] This includes both bills and resolutions.

toward Beijing during the Bush Administration and the bilateral relationship was relatively smooth (Dumbaugh 2006). As Shambaugh (2019) describes, U.S.-China relations under the Bush Administration experienced "the longest periods of stability and cooperation over the past 40 years." This stance was primarily motivated by the emphasis of U.S. foreign policy on counterterrorism and the perceived importance of China as a partner in the "War on Terror." China was seldom viewed by the U.S. as a direct threat during this period. However, Chinese foreign policy has been increasingly perceived as assertive since the 2009 financial crisis (Swaine 2010; Scobell and Harold 2013) and congressional antagonism towards China experienced a notable escalation since then (Kuk, Seligsohn, and Zhang 2018). Congress consistently highlighted China's economic, military, and technological challenges, marking a significant shift in the perception of China.

Second, we limited search results to measures that have at least one of the following words in their titles or summaries: *China, Chinese, People's Republic of China (PRC), Communist, Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong, Macau, Dalai, Uyghur, Huawei,* and *Zhongxing (ZTE)*. All these words are highly relevant to U.S.-China relations. After these two steps, we obtained 850 observations.

Finally, we excluded observations that do not aim to address China's threat to the U.S. We conducted an extensive review of the texts of all 850 measures and analyzed the press releases issued by their sponsors. This examination provided insights into the underlying reasons behind the proposals.[3] Each of the two authors coded all the observations and achieved an intercoder reliability of 90 percent, indicating a high degree of agreement. In cases where the authors had

[3] For example, Representative Mark Green (2021), in a press release regarding his introduction of a series of China-related measures, asserted that "Communist China's rise in military and economic power is one of the greatest security threats our nation faces today. China's leaders are now asserting dominance diplomatically, informationally, militarily, and economically. That's why I'm reintroducing several bills to strengthen our national security against the CCP's malign influence." We conclude that these measures portray China as a threat to the U.S. and therefore include them in our analysis.

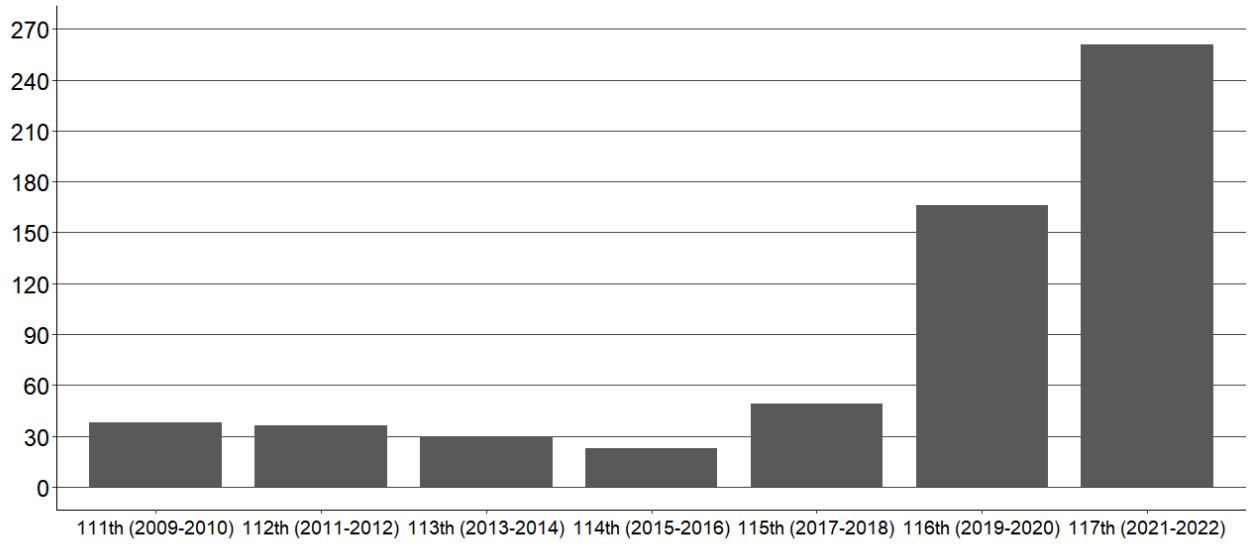
different opinions, we sought the input of a third scholar to assess the relevance of the measurement to China's threat, thereby making the final coding decision.

Ultimately, we excluded 247 among the 850 observations (29%), which fall into three categories. First, some measures simply make reference to China's participation in an international agreement in the background information, but their actual content is unrelated to China. For instance, a bill addressing Iran may allude to the Iran nuclear agreement, in which China is a participant. The second category comprises measures related to budgets, including authorization and appropriations measures. These omnibus measures are typically lengthier than traditional legislation and address a wide range of issues, and the proportion of China-related content within them is minimal, making it difficult to judge the views of legislators regarding China-related matters in these measures. The third category includes measures that express kindness or promote cooperation with China, such as expressing condolences to the victims of the 2010 earthquake in China. Our study includes only those observations that are relevant to the China threat. This decision is driven by our research question, which investigates the conditions under which legislators from opposing parties would collaborate to address *external threats*. Consequently, bills that express goodwill towards China or promote bilateral cooperation are outside the scope of our analysis.

After completing these procedures, we obtained a total of 603 measures, including bills (H.R. and H.J.Res.) and resolutions (H.Con.Res. and H.Res.). Each of these measures highlights China as a threat to the U.S., either domestically or internationally, encompassing security, economic, and ideological concerns. All the measures are presented in Table A1 in the Appendix. Figure 1 lists the number of China-related measures in each Congress and illustrates a significant surge

starting from the 116th Congress (2019-2020).

Figure 1. The Number of China-related Legislation by Congress (2009-2022)



Note: The y-axis represents the number of measures. Legislation includes both bills (H.R./H.J.Res.) and resolutions (H.Con.Res./H.Res.)

(2) Dependent and independent variables

Our dependent variable measures the level of bipartisan support for China-related legislation. An intuitive measurement is the outcome of roll-call voting. However, voting on China-related legislation is infrequent. Among the 603 China-related measures in our data, only 6% received roll-call votes and there were few dissenting votes (See Table A2 in the appendix). Solely focusing on these measures may lead to a selection bias problem. First, it is possible that certain types of bills and resolutions receive more attention from the House leadership, while others may not make it to the floor for a vote. This could skew our understanding of the overall legislative landscape on China and potentially make us overlook legislation that reflects diverse opinions towards China. Second, both parties may support a hardline stance on external threats but sharply differ on specific foreign policy actions (Myrick 2021). Limiting analysis to roll-call votes could thus falsely suggest the absence of polarization.

To overcome these shortcomings, we turned to the proportion of Democratic and Republican

cosponsors of each China-related measure. Recent studies show that cosponsoring is not merely cheap talk and that legislators take it seriously (e.g., Wichowsky and Weiss 2021). Legislators are selective in their choice of cosponsoring. In the 117th House (2021-2022), the average legislator cosponsored only 388 out of the 11,472 (3%) measures introduced. Legislators have limited time and resources to advance their goals. Each member faces an opportunity cost for every measure they participate in proposing, as they cannot spend the time pushing for other measures that might help to build a reputation. Compared to roll-call votes, cosponsoring is less constrained by party leaders and legislators have fewer cues to help them make judgements (Alemán et al. 2009). Therefore, they must examine cosponsoring decisions very carefully (Talbert and Potoski 2002).

Recent research in American Politics underscores legislators' recognition of cosponsoring as an important avenue to communicate policy preferences to their constituents and interest groups (e.g., Zhang et al. 2008; Koger 2003; Chaudoin, Milner, and Tingley, 2010). Through the strategic endorsement of selected bills, legislators proactively garner support from their peers in advancing proposed legislation (Zhang et al. 2008). Moreover, the analysis of cosponsoring allows us to examine nuanced aspects of roll call voting even when accounting for a legislator's ideology and party affiliation (Talbert 2002; Flower 2006; Chaudoin, Milner, and Tingley 2010). These characteristics of cosponsoring contribute to a better understanding of bipartisan support for China-related measures without selection bias.

According to the rules of the House, any measure can have only one sponsor, but there is no limit on the number of cosponsors it may have. We code a measure as 1 if all cosponsors are from the same party as the sponsor, and 0 if at least one cosponsor belongs to the opposing party. In other words, we consider a measure to have some bipartisan support if it has at least one cosponsor comes from the opposing party. We believe this threshold is appropriate given the high degree of

polarization in Congress. For instance, in the 117th House, only 38% of the introduced bills and resolutions received at least one cosponsor from the sponsor's opposing party, indicating that attracting even one cosponsor from the other party is not easy. Out of the 603 China-related measures in our data, 323 (54%) have support only from members of one party. This challenges the claim that China has become a highly bipartisan issue in Congress.

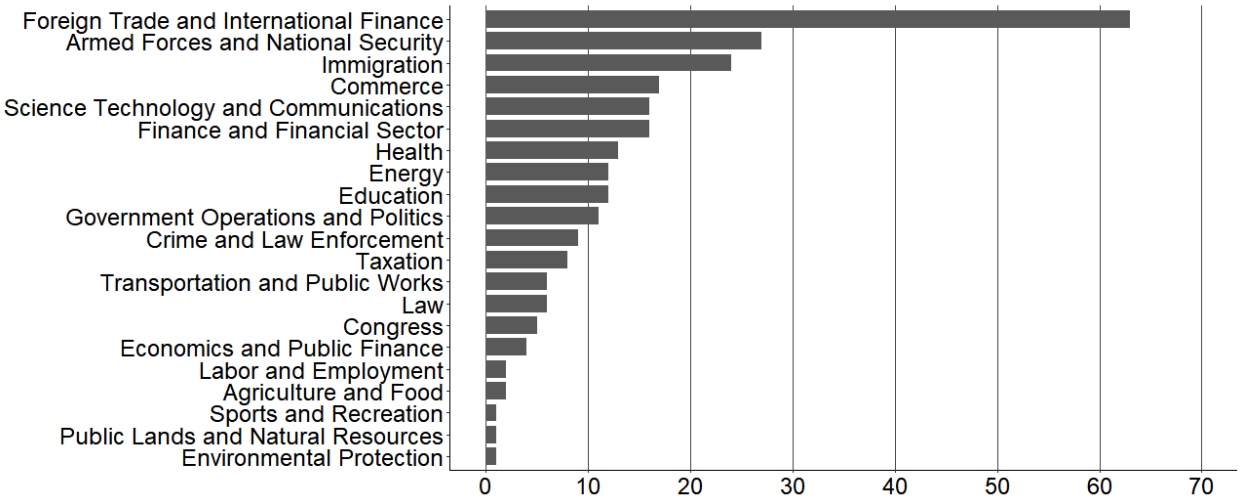
H_1 concerns whether a China-related measure relates to U.S. domestic affairs. We created a binary variable called "International Affairs", based on its major policy area term assigned by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). Each measure is assigned one of 32 broad policy area terms, such as Education, Tax, and Health. Measures assigned to "International Affairs" were coded 1 as they primarily focus on "foreign aid, human rights, international law and organizations; national governance; arms control; diplomacy and foreign officials; alliances and collective security," according to the definition.[4] These topics have implications primarily outside the U.S. Out of the 603 measures in our sample, 346 (57%) were assigned "International Affairs" as their major policy area term.

To test H_2, we need to examine measures that are relevant to U.S. domestic affairs and categorize them into two groups: those addressing issues one or both parties claim ownership of and those addressing issues neither party claimed ownership of. Fagan (2021) provides a systematic categorization for the ownership of the issues identified in the Comparative Agenda Project (CAP). We carefully reviewed the definitions of these issues in CAP as well as the definitions of issues in CRS, matching the categories established by CRS with those of CAP (Table 1 on page 17). Figure 2 presents the number of China-related legislation categorized according to

[4] An alternative way of categorizing congressional measures is to follow the Policy Agendas Project (Jones et al., 2023). CRS's categorization has two advantages: (1) It covers both bills and resolutions; (2) As of writing the paper, the Policy Agendas Project only covers bills up until 2016 while CRS' data are updated regularly.

the CRS policy area terms. Figure A1 in the appendix shows the number of partisan versus bipartisan measures in each category.

Figure 2. The Number of China-related Legislation by Policy Areas (2009-2022)



Note: The x-axis represents the number of measures. Legislation includes both bills (H.R./H.J.Res.) and resolutions (H.Con.Res./H.Res.)

(3) Control variables

We included several control variables and classified them into three groups: sponsor-related, measure-related, and timing-related factors. For sponsor-related factors, we first controlled for the ideology of the measure's sponsor. We expect that ideological extremists only attract cosponsors, if any, who are extremists as well from the same party. By contrast, ideological moderates' proposals are more likely to have support from both parties. We included the absolute value of the sponsor's first dimension of NOMINATE score (Poole and Rosenthal 2001). We removed three observations where the sponsor does not have a NOMINATE score. The total number of observations is 600. In addition, we controlled for the number of congressional terms that the sponsor has served when introducing the measure. The expectation is that legislators with more experience in Congress may be viewed as experts on the issue and have a greater ability to attract

Table 1: Issue Ownership Coding

Issue Area by CRS	Issue Area by CAP	Binary Ownership
Agriculture and Food	Agriculture	Neither
Armed Forces and National Security	Defense	Republican
Commerce	Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	Republican
Congress	Government Operations	Neither
Crime and Law Enforcement	Law, Crime, and Family Issues	Republican
Economics and Public Finance	Macroeconomics	Both
Education	Education	Democratic
Energy	Energy	Neither
Environmental Protection	Environment	Democratic
Finance and Financial Sector	Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	Republican
Foreign Trade and International Finance	Foreign Trade	Republican
Government Operations and Politics	Government Operations	Neither
Health	Health	Democratic
Immigration	Immigration	Republican
Labor and Employment	Labor and Employment	Democratic
Law	Law and Crime	Republican
Public Lands and Natural Resources	Public Lands and Water Management	Neither
Science Technology and Communications	Space, Science, Technology and Communication	Neither
Sports and Recreation	N/A	Neither
Taxation	Macroeconomics	Both
Transportation and Public Works	Transportation	Neither

Note: The coding scheme is derived from Fagan (2021), which classifies 20 major topic areas in the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) into four categories: by Democrats, by Republicans, by Both Parties, and by Neither Party. To assign policy areas to each measure, we carefully examined the definitions of the policy area terms used by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) and the major topic areas identified by the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) and matched them accordingly. We did not find an appropriate match for "Sports and Recreation." We classified it as "Claimed by Neither Party" due to its low level of party polarization. It is worth noting that our empirical results should not be influenced by the coding of this issue area given its low occurrence in our data (Figure 2).

cosponsors from both parties.

We also included two measure-related factors. We first controlled for the number of pages of the legislative proposals (logged). Longer proposals tend to cover a wider range of topics and can often delve into policy details, which may make them less likely to gain bipartisan consensus. We also accounted for whether the China-related proposal was a bill or a resolution. Bills, once enacted as laws, hold legal binding status and are included in the United States Code. Resolutions, on the other hand, only serve as expressions of the "sentiments" of the House. We controlled for this variable because the different nature of bills and resolutions can influence the specific content chosen by the sponsor, which in turn can impact the potential for bipartisan consensus.

Finally, we incorporated two timing-related factors. The first was the number of months that had passed since the beginning of the congressional term when the measure was introduced. We expect that the later the measure was introduced, the lower the likelihood of attracting cosponsors, as lawmakers may be more focused on election-related matters. We also accounted for the salience of the China issue in Congress when introducing the measure by including the number of China-related measures introduced in the same session of Congress. Our expectation is that when a China-related measure is introduced during a period when the China issue is salient, there is a greater likelihood of achieving bipartisan support.

Table 2 presents the summary of statistics. Our unit of analysis is each measure introduced over the span of 7 congresses (111^{th}-117^{th} House, 2009-2022). In this context, measures are nested within congresses, which creates a hierarchical data structure. Therefore, we used multilevel regressions with random intercepts varying by congress (Gelman and Hill 2006). We presented the mathematical representation of the model in the appendix.

Table 2: Summary of Statistics

Variable	Expected sign	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Sponsor's Ideology	+	0.473	0.169	0.088	0.936
Sponsor's Years of Service	−	10.658	10.429	0	40
Legislative length	+	1.860	0.906	0	7.752
Resolution	+/−	0.233	0.423	0	1
Months have passed	+	11.248	6.809	1	24
Salience	−	170.252	93.331	23	261

We used the Bayesian approach in this paper. The Bayesian approach and the traditional frequentist approach correspond to different data generating processes and differ in interpretations. The frequentist approach offers a single "best guess" for parameters and a 90% confidence interval tells us that if we were to conduct the experiment repeatedly, 90% of the computed confidence intervals would contain the true parameter value. This is not feasible in our study because our sample represents the entire population. We have no means of knowing whether the current confidence interval is one of the fortunate 90% and no possibility for further replications. Bayesian analysis considers all possible values that a parameter might take and represent them as a posterior distribution. A 90% credible interval in Bayesian analysis, generated from the posterior distribution of the parameter, is the range that has a 90% probability of including the true parameter value. It reflects the researchers' degree of belief in the parameters, considering both the data available and the prior information, and does not rely on the concept of "repeated sampling" as in frequentist statistics (Western and Jackman 1994, Kaplan 2023).

IV. Findings

Table 3 presents the results of our Bayesian models. In Bayesian analyses, inferences are drawn by summarizing the posterior distribution for each parameter, including estimating the mean, standard deviation, and credible intervals. The mean and standard deviation of the posterior are

roughly similar to a coefficient and standard error in frequentist statistics. Inferences regarding statistical significance are made using Bayesian credible intervals, which are similar to confidence intervals in frequentist statistics. A credible interval communicates the probability that a parameter lies in the constructed interval, conditional on the data. We establish the 90% credible intervals by calculating the 5th and 95th percentiles for each parameter based on its posterior distribution. The intervals represent a 90% probability that the true parameter falls within the range. The selection of a 90% credible interval in Bayesian models has seen widespread use in literature (See, for example, Bartels 2009; Stadelmann-Steffen and Vatter 2012; Schwindt-Bayer, Malecki, and Crisp 2010; Bloom and Thames 2021).

Table 3: Bipartisan Consensus on China in the U.S. House of Representatives, 2009-2022

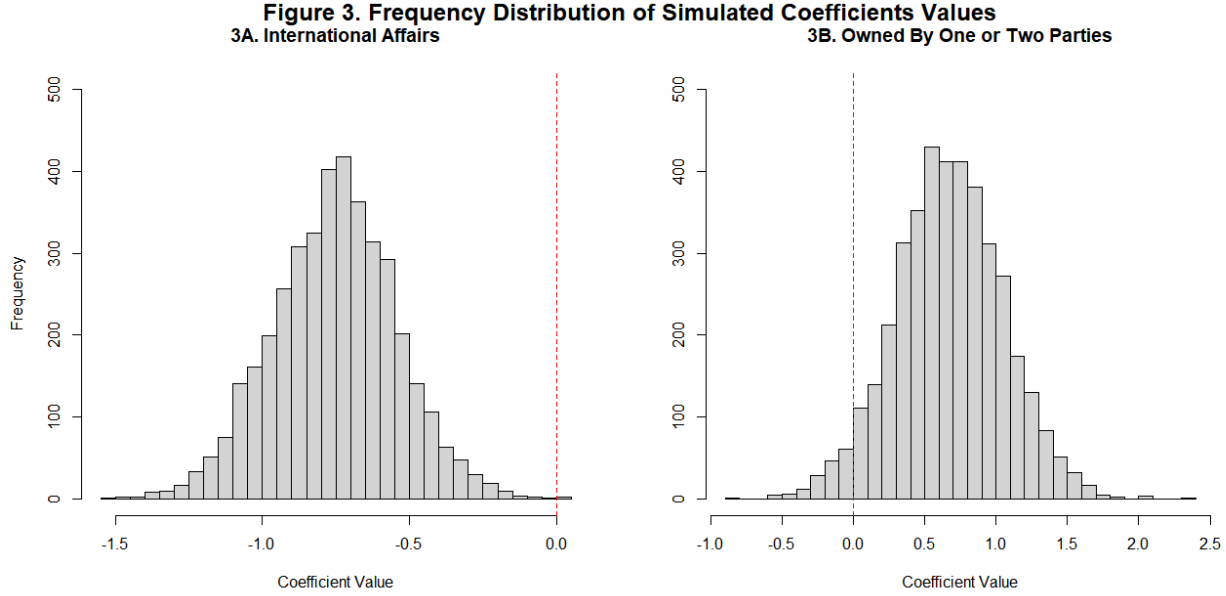
	(1) Domestic/International Affairs			(2) Issue Ownership		
	Estimate	SD	90% CI	Estimate	SD	90% CI
International Affairs	−0.754	0.210	(−1.099, −0.415)			
Owned By One or Two Parties				0.671	0.379	(0.040, 1.292)
Sponsor factors						
Sponsor's Ideology	3.777	0.615	(2.756, 4.786)	3.787	1.036	(2.108, 5.550)
Sponsor's Years of Service	−0.016	0.011	(−0.033, 0.002)	−0.007	0.017	(−0.035, 0.021)
Bill factors						
Legislation Length	−0.122	0.108	(−0.301, 0.053)	−0.388	0.176	(−0.681, −0.107)
Resolution	0.025	0.266	(−0.408, 0.474)	0.910	0.757	(−0.259, 2.213)
Timing factors						
Months Have Passed	0.029	0.014	(0.006, 0.052)	0.032	0.024	(−0.006, 0.071)
Salience	0.007	0.002	(0.005, 0.010)	0.008	0.003	(0.003, 0.013)
Observations		600			256	

Note: Multilevel logistic models with random intercepts estimated for congresses. The dependent variable is whether all cosponsors are from the sponsor's party. Measures are coded 1 if yes and 0 otherwise. In Model (2), the baseline category is "Owned by neither party."

In Model (1), *International Affairs* is negatively associated with our dependent variable, measured by whether all cosponsors are from the sponsor's party (1 = yes, 0 = no). The point estimate for *International Affairs* is -0.76, and the 90% credible interval lies to the left of 0. Compared to China-related legislation dealing with U.S. domestic affairs, measures dealing with international affairs are less likely to be partisan. Figure 3A plots the distribution of 4,000

simulated coefficients of *International Affairs*. The majority of the coefficients are concentrated on the left side of 0, specifically in the range between -1 and -0.5. This distribution provides strong evidence that Democrats and Republicans are more inclined to collaborate in addressing China's threat when the measures are unrelated to U.S. domestic affairs.

Figure 3. Frequency Distribution of Simulated Coefficients Values



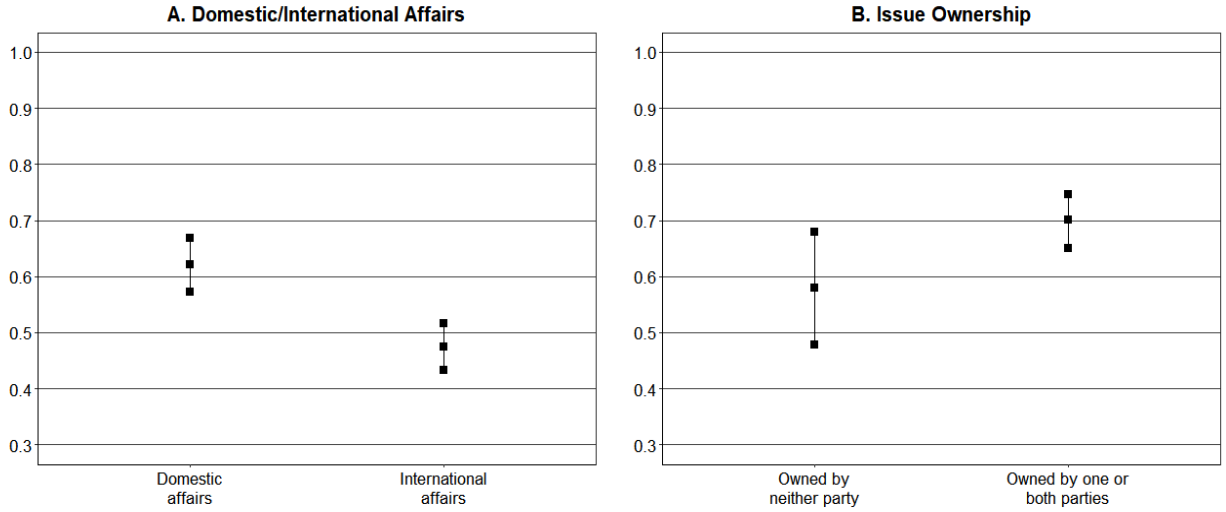
When measures are related to U.S. domestic affairs, we categorize them into two groups: those dealing with issues neither party claims ownership of and those dealing with issues one or both parties claim ownership of. In Model (2) of Table 3, we establish the baseline group as issues neither party claims ownership of. The results confirm our hypothesis that measures addressing issues one or both parties claim ownership of exhibit a higher degree of partisanship compared to the baseline group. The point estimate for *Claimed by One or Two Parties* is 0.67, and the 90% credible interval lies to the right of 0. Figure 3B shows that the majority of the 4,000 simulated coefficients fall to the right side of 0. In our data, we identified six measures that are related to "Transportation and Public Works", an issue neither party claims ownership of (Table 1). All of

them contain provisions that aim to restrict Chinese entities' involvement in certain areas of U.S. infrastructure and transportation. Four of the six bills received support from both parties. In particular, H.R.2739 from the 116th Congress prohibits the awarding of a contract to procure rolling stock for public transportation if the manufacturer is owned or controlled by a nonmarket economy country like China. This bill was introduced by a Democrat and received 57 cosponsors, and 37 of which are Republicans. This is uncommon in a highly polarized Congress.

To interpret the substantive significance of our findings, we utilized the observed value approach (Hanmer and Kalkan 2013). Specifically, we held *International Affairs* in Table 3 at 0 and all the other control variables at their observed values for each measure. We drew 4,000 sets of simulated coefficients and for each set of coefficients, we calculated the predicted probability for each case and took their average. Therefore, we obtained 4,000 predicted probabilities when *International Affairs* takes 0 and presented the 90% credible interval around the mean in Figure 4A. We then held *International Affairs* at 1 and repeated the process. Figure 4B was generated based on the same process.

Figure 4A displays that when a China-related measure engages with U.S. domestic affairs, it has a 62% probability of being highly partisan, higher than the 48% probability of a measure that is not related to U.S. domestic affairs. Figure 4B shows that for legislation that engages with U.S. domestic affairs, measures addressing issues neither party claims ownership of have an 58% probability of being highly partisan. Measures covering issues one or two parties claim ownership of have a probability of 70% being highly partisan.

Figure 4. Statistical Simulation Results for Predicted Probabilities of China-Related Legislation Being Highly Partisan with 90% Credible Intervals



Note: Figure 4A and 4B are based on Model (1) and (2) in Table 3, respectively. Credible intervals are calculated from 4,000 simulations. The dependent variable is whether all cosponsors are from the sponsor's party. Measures are coded 1 if yes and 0 otherwise.

V. Robustness Checks

We undertook several additional analyses to further explore the relationship between the issue areas of the China-related measure and bipartisanship. The results from these analyses are provided in the appendix. First, we employed different thresholds for measuring bipartisanship. Specifically, we set the thresholds based on whether there are at least 4, 3, or 2 cosponsors from the sponsor's opposing party, respectively. Tables A3-A5 in the appendix show the results of these robustness checks. These results are similar to the original model in the main text. In Model (1) across all three tables, the coefficients for "International Affairs" are negative, with 90% credible intervals falling to the left of zero. In Table A3 and Table A5, the coefficients for "Owned by One or Two Parties" in Model (2) are positive and the credible intervals fall to the right side of zero. In Table A4, while the 90% credible interval in Model (2) includes zero, the majority of simulated coefficients fall to the right of zero. In general, these robustness checks support our hypotheses.

Second, we recategorized measures identified as addressing "Armed Forces and National

Security" and "Foreign Trade and International Finance," given their potential to be classified as both domestic and international affairs. We first excluded these two categories from the sample. We then combined them with "International Affairs." The findings are presented in Tables A6 and A7, respectively. Overall, the results remain consistent with the models in the main text.

Third, we conducted an additional robustness check by incorporating all China-related measures, including those aiming to address the threat from China and those that are neutral or favorable to China. As shown in Table A8 in the appendix, our results remain consistent, regardless of whether these additional bills and resolutions are included or excluded.

VI. Discussion and Conclusion

Many observers contend that adopting a tough approach towards China is one of the few bipartisan issues left in U.S. Congress. This Research Note reveals that there is significant variation in bipartisan support for China-related legislation in Congress. We examine the conditions under which the Democratic and Republican parties can jointly support a measure targeting China, and the conditions under which the two parties may disagree. We argue that bipartisan support is possible when, first, the proposed legislation is not related to U.S. domestic affairs and, second, neither party claims ownership of the issue addressed by the legislation when the legislation is related to U.S. domestic affairs.

When confronted with external competitors, it is reasonable to assume that parties will put aside their differences and unify. However, we argue that the likelihood of different parties uniting in response to an external threat is closely related to their competition in domestic affairs, particularly when parties aspire to prove to the voters that they possess greater competence in addressing a specific issue. In such a scenario, the priority given to strengthening a party's brand may outweigh the importance of tackling external threats. As this Research Note and an increasing

body of literature highlight (e.g., Myrick 2021), the influence of U.S. domestic politics cannot be overlooked. When confronted with China's challenges, do the Democrats and Republicans unite in response, setting aside domestic rifts, or do they utilize the situation for domestic political gains? The choice carries profound implications not only for U.S.-China relations but also for the broader international landscape. Although our paper focuses on the House, future research could investigate whether our theory also applies to the Senate.

While our paper demonstrates that issue ownership is a significant factor in legislators' decisions to cosponsor China-related legislation, our model cannot rule out the possibility of alternative mechanisms contributing to bipartisan support. Previous research indicates that ideology and interest groups play crucial roles in shaping cosponsoring dynamics on Capitol Hill (e.g., Campbell 1982; Box-Steffensmeier, Christenson, and Craig 2019). Future research could further explore how ideological dimensions (e.g., hawks versus doves or cooperative internationalism versus militant internationalism) or advocacy groups influence bipartisan support for China-related legislation.

Caution is warranted in interpreting our findings, as they may not generalize to contexts where domestic consensus on external threats is absent. While we observe bipartisan support on China-related issues – such as condemning human rights violations, coercion toward Taiwan, and aggression in the South China Sea – this consensus may not extend to other external threats. For instance, public and elite opinion on U.S. support for Ukraine remains deeply divided (Pew Research Center 2024; Rogin 2024). As a result, bipartisan backing for Russia-related legislation is probably even less likely, especially when such bills intersect with U.S. domestic politics. Myrick's (2021) analysis of congressional speeches further shows that the U.S. "responses to foreign threats reflect the domestic political environment in which they are introduced" (923)

Future research could expand our study by investigating bipartisan consensus on other contemporary threats, such as Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Finally, scholars can build on Milner and Tingley's work (2015) by further breaking down issue areas into specific policy instruments and examining, from the perspectives of ideological division and the level of distributive politics, whether different policy instruments within the same issue area will lead to varying levels of bipartisanship.

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