

“Red China” and the “Yellow Peril”: How Ideology Divides Americans over China

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*Based on a 2011 national survey, I argue that while US conservatives feel somewhat cooler toward the East Asian democracies than US liberals do, they feel much cooler toward China. Greater average conservative than liberal prejudice lingers, cooling attitudes toward the “Yellow Peril” of all Asian countries, but communism is a larger source of ideological differences over China. For cultural, social, economic, and political reasons, conservatives feel substantially cooler than liberals toward both communist countries in general and “Red China” in particular. I conclude by suggesting that with gerrymandering and ongoing ideological sorting, these ideological differences over China on Main Street may come to play a greater role in the making of US China policy. **KEYWORDS:** ideology, liberal, conservative, US-China relations, “Red China,” “Yellow Peril,” communism, libertarianism, social dominance*

US POLITICAL ELITES IN BOTH PARTIES ARE INTERNALLY DIVIDED OVER China. On the left, some Democrats argue for a pro-China policy of engagement to better integrate China into the global economic, political, and security orders. Other Democratic elites, concerned about Chinese human rights abuses, advocate for tougher China policies. “The plight of the people of Tibet is a challenge to the conscience of the world,” Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi proclaimed on March 12, 2008. “The United States must be prepared to confront the Chinese government when they violate the human rights of their people.” Yet other Democrats on Capitol Hill, many representing heavily blue-collar districts, join Big Labor in condemning unfair Chinese trade practices and advocating tougher US trade policies toward China.

Republican elites are equally divided on China policy. Business conservatives have historically promoted a friendlier China policy conducive to increased trade, investment, and profits. For instance, the US-China Business Council and AmCham China, which lobby on behalf of US companies doing business with China, have worked closely with many probusiness Republicans on Capitol Hill to support pro-China and block anti-China legislation. Military hawks and Christian conservatives, however, usually argue for tougher China policies. Congressman Randy Forbes of Virginia serves on the House Armed Services Committee and cochairs its China Caucus, frequently promoting tougher positions on China. New Jersey Congressman Christopher Smith, who has held dozens of hearings to deplore China's lack of religious freedoms, has also advocated a tougher US China policy, but for very different reasons. "China's continued repression of religion is among the most despotic in the world," Smith (2006), a Christian conservative who founded the House Pro-Life Caucus, argues. "Today, numerous underground Roman Catholic priests and bishops and Protestant pastors languish in the infamous concentration camps of China for simply proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Democratic and Republican Party elites thus appear internally divided over China. Are Main Street Americans similarly conflicted, so that there are no overall liberal-conservative differences over China among the US public at large?

The predominant argument among US political scientists and pollsters today is that neither partisanship nor ideology shapes US public opinion toward China—or any other country (see Gries 2014). In their *Living with the Dragon: How the American Public Views the Rise of China*, Benjamin Page and Tao Xie (2010, 37, 57, 66, 103) specifically and repeatedly claim, based upon their reading of existing survey data, that ideology has "little impact" on the attitudes of the American public toward China (for a critique, see Gries 2011). This argument is consistent with Page's earlier claims that partisanship and ideology do *not* shape the international attitudes of the American people in general (Page with Bouton 2006, 95–96), or their attitudes toward Asia in particular (Page, Rabinovich, and Tully 2008, 45, 47).

The pollsters largely agree. Pew's Andrew Kohut has argued that among the US public, "partisan differences are slight." Neither religion nor nationalism, furthermore, shapes Americans' views on foreign affairs (Kohut and Stokes 2006, 218, 94, 70). More recently, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA 2012, 4, 44) has similarly

declared that the media's focus on popular polarization is "exaggerated": among the general public, "Republicans and Democrats rarely disagree on key foreign policy issues."

In this article I argue that these political scientists and pollsters have misinterpreted the public opinion data: Main Street liberals and conservatives today are remarkably *divided* in their views of China and East Asia. Greater average conservative than liberal prejudice lingers, cooling attitudes toward the "Yellow Peril" of all Asian countries. But communism is a larger source of ideological differences over China. For cultural, social, economic, *and* political reasons, conservatives feel substantially cooler than liberals toward both communist countries in general, and "Red China" in particular. I conclude by suggesting that with gerrymandering and ongoing ideological sorting, these ideological differences over China on Main Street may come to play a greater role in the making of US China policy. We may, therefore, be poised for a significant change in the politics of China policy on Capitol Hill.

Measurement Matters

We hired the Palo Alto, California, survey research company YouGov to implement a national US Internet survey in spring 2011. It used a "sample matching" methodology (see Rivers 2005; Ansolabehere and Rivers 2013) to generate a representative national sample of 1,000 respondents, first matching them on gender, age, race, education, party identification, ideology, and political interest, and then weighting the final dataset to match the full US general population on age, gender, race, education, and religion.

There are two major reasons why a new survey was needed. First, to my knowledge, existing national surveys have largely explored either ideology or international attitudes in general or China attitudes in particular. The General Social Survey (GSS) and American National Election Surveys (ANES) have measured US ideology for decades, but rarely ask questions about international affairs. By contrast, the CCGA, Pew, and the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) have been asking questions about international affairs for years, but rarely ask many questions about ideology. Similarly, the Committee of 100 has been surveying US attitudes toward China for years, but does not ask many questions about ideology. By combining these two types of questions within a single survey, our dataset provides new leverage to explore how ideology shapes Americans' attitudes toward China and East Asia.

Second, improving both survey sampling and measurement is necessary to allow the full extent of the relationships among our variables to fully emerge. When psychologists limit themselves to university student samples, range restriction can reduce the size of the observed associations among variables. For example, because most university students are about the same age and education level, it is difficult to ascertain the true extent of any associations between age or education and any other variable using a student sample.

Political science surveys, for their part, often suffer from high measurement error, leading to type II errors, or false negatives—such as the erroneous claim that Americans are united in their views of China and the world (see Gries 2014, 18–21). Public opinion surveys too often rely on single questions with limited response options. While single, dichotomous questions are fine for some substantive opinions—“Do you plan to vote for Barack Obama or Mitt Romney?”—they are insufficient to capture more complex ideologies and (international) attitudes. Single-item measures can decrease the observed associations among variables as more error and less “true score” variation are captured and correlated (see, e.g., Osterlind 2006; Thorndike and Thorndike-Christ 2009). Furthermore, binary response categories, such as forcing a choice between “engaging” and “containing” China, fail to capture the nuances of complex attitudes. They also limit the variation necessary to ensure that the full extent of the associations among variables can become apparent. In short, measures of low internal reliability and insufficient variability have often produced low or inconsistent associations between ideology and international attitudes in existing public opinion surveys, contributing to the many false negatives in existing public opinion scholarship.

Poor question wording also plagues many public opinion surveys, distorting our understanding of key concepts. For instance, for decades the ANES and the GSS have measured ideology by asking respondents to place themselves on a seven-point scale from “extremely liberal” to “extremely conservative.” To be “extreme” is not normatively desirable, however. This has pushed respondents away from the edges of the distribution. In 2010 ANES substituted “very” for “extreme,” while also reporting the results from Knowledge Network’s public profile ideology question, which retained the “extreme” wording.¹ While only 7.4 percent of their respondents were willing to describe themselves as “extremely” liberal or conser-

vative, 18.4 percent of the *very same respondents* were willing to describe themselves as “very” liberal or conservative. “Extreme” even swelled the numbers of respondents choosing the neutral (4) position, from 30.9 percent to 38.1 percent, likely because of a negative exemplar effect: some people may associate “extremely liberal” and “extremely conservative” with people they find distasteful, like Bill Maher or Rush Limbaugh, and so distance themselves from *any* ideology. In short, a poor choice of diction—“extremely”—has contributed to producing an artificially moderate picture of the US ideological landscape for decades.² Such poor measurement of ideology has abetted scholars like Morris Fiorina in making the absurd claim that the US public is *not* ideologically divided (see, e.g., Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2011). Instead, Alan Abramowitz (2006, 2010) is correct that the “culture wars” are no myth: Main Street America is divided over issues like abortion—and, I add, China policy.

By combining the best of political science (sampling) and psychological (measurement) survey methods, I hope to overcome these problems of survey design, providing a more accurate picture of the relationship between ideology and US views of China and East Asia.

Liberals, Conservatives, and East Asia

In our 2011 YouGov survey, the average American felt cool (35°) toward China, but the average conservative (22°) felt a full 18° cooler toward China than the average liberal (40°) did, a large difference statistically.³ By contrast, Americans felt substantially warmer toward the East Asian democracies of Taiwan (49°), South Korea (50°), and Japan (60°), with conservatives feeling just 6°, 6°, and 8° cooler, respectively, than liberals did toward each.⁴

What’s more, the ideological cleavage over feelings toward China shapes foreign policy preferences. In addition to the “China” item in a 1–7 “much friendlier” to “much tougher” rating scale of foreign policy preferences toward fifteen countries, we included two additional 1–7 “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” items in our 2011 survey:

- The best way to deal with China is to build up our military to counter Chinese power.
- The US government should pursue a tougher China policy.

The resulting three-item scale ($\alpha = .68$) revealed that, on average, US conservatives desired a great deal tougher China policy than liberals did.⁵

Could these substantial ideological differences over China actually be driven by ideological covariates like income or partisanship? Is there a colinearity problem?

All analyses of covariance (ANCOVA), regressions, and mediation analyses in this article covary or "control for" seven standard demographic variables: age, gender, education, income, being black (race), being Hispanic (ethnicity), and being from the US South (region). In the case of warmth toward China analyzed above, only gender was a statistically significant covariate, with men feeling cooler toward China than women.⁶ So it cannot be said that income ($p = .17$), for example, is the real driver of these ideological differences over China.

Partisanship is a more complicated counterargument. How do we know that ideology trumps partisanship in driving US attitudes toward China?⁷ Following the publication of *The American Voter* in 1960, the "Michigan Model" of voting behavior, with its focus on partisanship, has dominated the study of US elections (Campbell et al. 1960). Ideology, by contrast, has been treated more skeptically, if at all (see Federico 2012, 79; Jacoby 2011, 442). For instance, the 2010 edition of the authoritative and comprehensive *Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior* (Leighley 2010) does not even include entries for "ideology," "liberalism," or "conservatism" in its subject index, let alone chapters on them. The subject index entry for "party identification," by contrast, merits sixteen subheadings. Political scientist Marc Hetherington (2012, 115) has even declared partisanship to be the "most important" variable shaping not just voting but "a person's political behaviors, positions on issues, or feelings about groups."

Partisanship does not explain everything. Hetherington and other students of US politics have elevated partisanship too high at ideology's expense. While partisanship may do a better job than ideology in accounting for highly partisan attitude objects like Obama or "Obamacare," and overtly partisan behaviors like voting, the more psychologically fundamental ideology is usually the more powerful driver of our deeper sociopolitical attitudes and policy preferences. Partisanship is rooted in ideology, which is the real source of many seemingly partisan attitudes.

With the ongoing sorting of liberals into the Democratic Party and conservatives into the Republican Party, partisanship and ideology are increasingly intercorrelated. From 1972 to 2004, American National Election Surveys revealed a fourfold increase in their overlap, from 10 percent ($r = .32$) to 40 percent ($r = .63$) (Abramowitz 2006, 114; Bafumi and Shapiro 2009, 9–10). In our 2011 survey, they overlapped a remarkable 53 percent ($r = .73$), perhaps reflecting further sorting over time or, more likely, more accurate survey measurement, as discussed above. Ideology and partisanship today, in short, appear to share as much as half of their variance.

When ideology and partisanship are set against each other to predict feelings toward China or China policy preferences, however, ideology is consistently the stronger predictor. For instance, when pit against each other in a regression explaining warmth toward China, only ideology (standardized $\beta = -.22$, $p < .001$) and not partisanship ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .37$) is a statistically significant predictor. The same is true for our three-item China policy scale, introduced above: only ideology ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$) and not partisanship ($\beta = .07$, $p = .12$) predicts desires for a tougher China policy. Indeed, where ideology accounted for 11 percent of the unique variance in China policy preferences, partisanship accounted for none. This article, therefore, differs from more than fifty years of scholarship on US public opinion by focusing on ideology rather than partisanship.

What are the sources of these substantial, consistent, and robust ideological differences over China and East Asia? I begin with an exploration of two distinct pathways to China policy preferences: via the “Chinese people” and the “Chinese government.” Main Street US conservatives desire a tougher China policy than liberals do in small part because, on average, they maintain more prejudicial attitudes toward Asians in general and the Chinese people in particular. Conservatives also, however, desire a tougher China policy than liberals do in larger part because, on average, they maintain much more negative attitudes toward communist countries in general and the Chinese government in particular. I then turn to a closer examination of how four dimensions of US ideology—cultural, socioracial, economic, and political—each contribute to ideological polarization over communism and China. For instance, cultural conservatives and libertarians may disagree over what they most dislike about China, but they can agree that they dislike China more than liberals do.

I then turn to a brief comparative exploration of how ideology shapes Americans' feelings toward the East Asian democracies of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. As was the case with China, greater prejudice against "Orientals" contributes to slightly greater average conservative than liberal coolness toward these East Asian democracies. But their greater libertarianism leads conservatives to feel slightly warmer than liberals do toward these fellow democracies in "Free Asia." Social and political ideologies, in other words, counteract each other, reducing overall liberal-conservative differences in feelings toward East Asia's democracies.

I conclude by returning to Capitol Hill from Main Street, speculating on the policy implications of ideologically divided public opinion over China. Since the global financial crisis, China has become more assertive on both economic and security affairs and US corporate elites are no longer as united in support of China. Greater conservative coolness toward China on Main Street may, therefore, begin to be more clearly expressed in the domestic politics of US China policy.

"Red China" and the "Yellow Peril"

Does the "Yellow Peril" continue to shape US views of Asia? Or have the civil rights movement and racial integration since the 1960s eliminated race as an influence on US views of Asia? And after thirty-five years of "reform and opening," China today is arguably communist in name only. Do liberal and conservative feelings about "Red China" nonetheless continue to shape their China policy preferences?

To best answer these questions, we decided to measure how Americans feel about the Chinese people and government separately.⁸ In addition to a 0°–100° cold to warm feeling thermometer item on "China," therefore, we included feeling thermometers for "the Chinese people" and "the Chinese government." And to reduce measurement error and increase the internal reliability of these two measures, we also added a pair of more cognitive items that were evaluated on a seven-point "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" scale:

- The Chinese GOVERNMENT is trustworthy. (reverse coded)
- The Chinese GOVERNMENT is devious.

- The Chinese PEOPLE are trustworthy. (reverse coded)
- The Chinese PEOPLE are devious.

After reverse coding the feeling thermometer and “trustworthy” items, we standardized and averaged them together to form three-item “prejudice against the Chinese people” and “negative attitudes toward the Chinese government” scales, both of good internal reliability.⁹

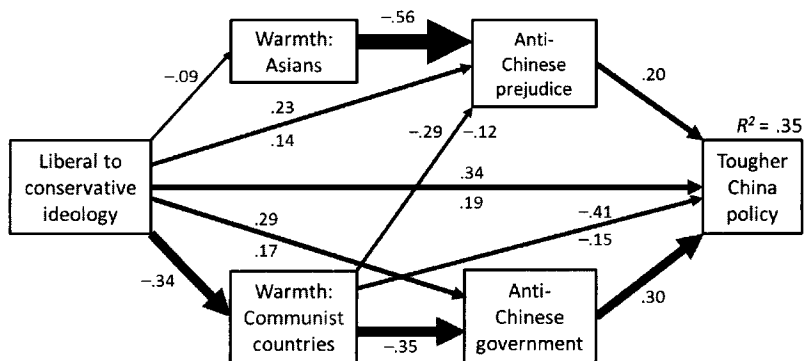
On average, Americans felt a whopping 34° cooler toward the Chinese government (21°) than toward the Chinese people (55°), an extremely large difference statistically.¹⁰ Just as conservatives felt 18° cooler than liberals toward “China,” they felt 11° cooler toward “the Chinese people” and 15° cooler toward “the Chinese government,” medium and large differences statistically.¹¹ Our survey also included thermometer items measuring feelings toward “Asians” and “Communist countries.” On average, conservatives scored 5° and 19° cooler than liberals on these two items, respectively, small and large differences statistically.¹²

Would cooler conservative than liberal feelings toward the Chinese people and their government and Asians and communist countries more broadly help account for their preference for a tougher China policy? The mediation model in Figure 1 reveals that they did: the inclusion of these four mediators accounts for a full three-quarters of the direct relationship between ideology and China policy preferences.¹³

Mediation analyses are utilized to test whether one or more variables “transmit” variation from a predictor to a criterion variable, answering the *how* question of the mechanism(s) or pathway(s) through which two variables relate to one another (see Hayes 2013). Establishing causal mediation is extremely difficult. First, it is nearly impossible to anticipate and measure all possible mediators of a relationship, so one cannot be fully confident that the mediators tested are the true drivers of an indirect relationship. Second, with correlational data like ours, one can never be sure of the exact causal sequence (see Green, Ha, and Bullock 2010). It may be best, therefore, to think of the mediation models in this article as demonstrating syndromes of variables that go together, rather than as strong claims about which variables come first.

Figure 1 reveals that there are two largely distinct pathways to China policy preferences. Liberals and conservatives can differ over

Figure 1 Racial Prejudice and Anti-Communism: Two Paths from Ideology to China Policy Preferences



Source: University of Oklahoma Political Psychology of US-China Relations research lab.

Notes: A mediation model. Arrow thickness in this and all subsequent figures reflects the weight of the standardized coefficients. In this and all subsequent figures $p < .001$. Coefficients above the central horizontal line (here: $\beta = .34$) reflect the unmediated relationship; those below the horizontal (here: $\beta = .19$) reflect what remains after the mediators are included. All indirect paths displayed were statistically significant. See Appendix 1 for details. All three China measures are three-item scales. Seven demographic covariates, none of which was statistically significant, are not shown to reduce clutter.

China policy because of differences in their average warmth toward Asians in general and the Chinese people in particular (the top path in the model). Traces of the "Yellow Peril" thus persist in the public imagination. As the consistently thicker lines along the bottom path in the model reveal, however, on average liberals and conservatives differ on China policy in larger part because of their greater differences in warmth toward communist countries in general and the Chinese government in particular.¹⁴ Anticommunism continues to divide Americans over "Red China" today.

Our 2011 data are consistent with work in social psychology demonstrating that on average conservatives are slightly more prejudiced against Asians ($\beta = -.09$; see the top left of Figure 1; when p values are omitted in this article, it can be assumed that $p < .001$) than liberals are (see e.g., Sidanius and Pratto 1999). But it is much greater conservative (13°) than liberal (32°) coolness toward communist countries ($\beta = -.34$; see the bottom left of Figure 1) that plays the

larger role in accounting for overall liberal-conservative differences over China policy. The ideological sources of Americans' feelings about communism therefore merit closer examination.

The Sources of Anticommunism on Main Street Today

Not all liberals and conservatives are alike. While the unidimensional liberal-conservative self-placement scale used for decades is extremely useful (see Jost 2006), political scientists have increasingly recognized its limits. Stanley Feldman and Christopher Johnston (2014, 353) argue that “parsimony is a desirable goal in science. . . . However, this must be balanced against the need for an accurate description of social phenomena. A unidimensional model of ideology . . . does not do justice to the ways in which people actually organize their political beliefs.” Shawn Treier and Sunshine Hillygus (2009, 680) similarly argue that “the belief systems of the mass public are multidimensional.” Both sets of scholars move from a unidimensional conceptualization and operationalization of US ideology to advocating a two-dimensional approach, tapping distinct economic (e.g., taxation) and sociocultural (e.g., the culture wars) ideologies.

We decided to explore whether US ideology could be usefully understood across not just two dimensions but four: cultural, socioracial, economic, and political. This analytic approach is consistent with commonsense understandings of the main issues that divide liberals and conservatives in the United States today. For instance, in a review of scholarship on conservatism, Kim Phillips-Fein (2011, 727) argues that most historians believe that “its central concerns included anti-communism, a laissez-faire approach to economics, opposition to the civil rights movement, and commitment to traditional sexual norms.” In our terms, these refer precisely to the political, economic, socioracial, and cultural dimensions of US ideology, respectively.

Cultural ideology was measured using three items ($\alpha = .77$) from the “conventionalism” (Altemeyer 1996) or “traditionalism” (Duckitt et al. 2010) facet of Bob Altemeyer’s right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) scale:

1. There is absolutely nothing wrong with nudist camps.
(reverse coded)
2. This country will flourish if young people stop experimenting with drugs, alcohol, and sex, and focus on family values.

3. There is nothing wrong with premarital sexual intercourse.
(reverse coded)

Socioracial ideology was measured using three items ($\alpha = .61$) from the "group dominance" facet of Jim Sidanius and Felicia Platto's (1999) social dominance orientation (SDO) scale:

1. Inferior groups should stay in their place.
2. It's probably a BAD thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom. (reverse coded)
3. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.

Economic ideology was measured with three items ($\alpha = .81$) we created exploring attitudes toward income inequality:

1. Differences between high and low incomes should remain as they are.
2. The government should decrease income differences.
(reverse coded)
3. Class differences should be smaller than they are today.
(reverse coded)

Finally, *political ideology* was measured with four items ($\alpha = .68$) we created assessing communitarian-libertarian beliefs:

1. American society has swung too far toward individual rights at the expense of social responsibilities. (reverse coded)
2. Individual rights are more important than the good of the group.
3. Individuals should be free to follow their own dreams in their own ways, without interference from government.
4. Government must limit our individual freedoms so as to prevent unchecked selfishness, greed, and immorality. (reverse coded) (from Mehrabian 1996, 490)

Run together in an exploratory factor analysis, these thirteen survey items produced a clear four-factor solution in which twelve of the thirteen items fell cleanly on the correct factor.¹⁵ Factor analysis is a statistical technique used to uncover the latent dimensions or unobserved variables (called factors) that explain variation in a larger number of measured (i.e., observed) variables, such as the thirteen

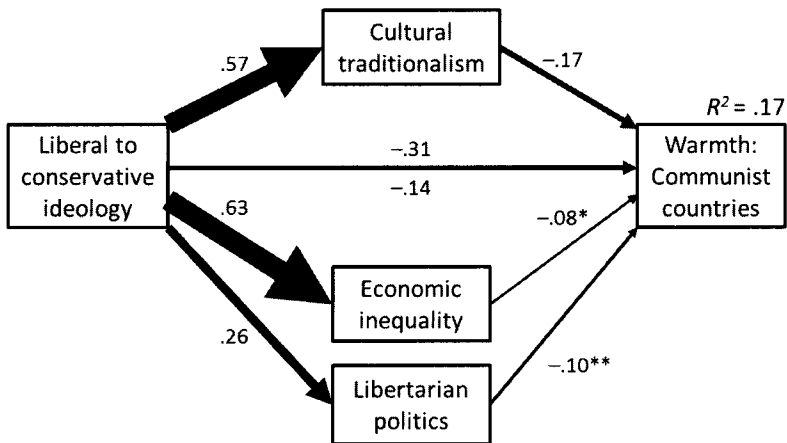
ideology items above. We therefore averaged them together into four scales of fair to good internal reliability, as the Cronbach's α reported above reveal.

In a simultaneous multiple regression controlling for seven standard demographic variables (age, gender, education, income, race, ethnicity, and region) these four scales—cultural ($\beta = .41$), socio-racial ($\beta = .12$), economic ($\beta = .37$), and political ($\beta = .12$) ideologies—each contributed statistically significant *unique variance* in the correct direction to the standard unidimensional measure of liberal-conservative ideology, together accounting for a remarkable half of its variation ($R^2 = .49$). These two statistical analyses provide convergent evidence for the internal and external validity of our four dimensions of US ideology.

A multiple mediation analysis revealed that three of these four dimensions of US ideology contributed to the 19° gap between liberal and conservative feelings toward communist countries. As shown in Figure 2, only social dominance orientation did not mediate the relationship, which makes sense, as communism is not a racial issue. Together, the mediators accounted for over 90 percent of the direct relationship between liberal-conservative ideology and warmth toward communist countries.¹⁶

Cultural traditionalism, the top path in Figure 2, was the most powerful mediator of the relationship between broad liberal-conservative ideology and feelings toward communist countries. Christian conservatives have long viewed communism as an atheistic threat to God and Christian values. “Communism is not only an economic interpretation of life,” Reverend Billy Graham declared in 1949, “Communism is a religion that is inspired, directed and motivated by the Devil himself who has declared war against Almighty God.” In his famous 1983 “Evil Empire” speech given to the National Association of Evangelicals, President Ronald Reagan similarly equated the fight against communism with the fight against “evil.” “Fighting communism was a religious duty, and the American government was engaged in the work of the Lord when it opposed the Soviet Union,” historian Daniel Williams (2010, 21, 23) writes in *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*. “The ‘American way of life’ was therefore the Christian way of life, and a threat to one was a threat to the other.”

Billy Graham is right that communism is primarily an “economic interpretation of life.” Marx was an economic historian, and Marxism is largely an economic theory. It is not surprising, therefore, that dif-

Figure 2 Why Conservatives Dislike Communism More Than Liberals Do

Source: University of Oklahoma Political Psychology of US-China Relations research lab.

Notes: A mediation model. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, all other p 's $< .001$. All three indirect paths were statistically significant. See Appendix I. Coefficients above the horizontal line (here: $\beta = -.31$) reflect the unmediated relationship; those below the horizontal (here: $\beta = -.14$) reflect what remains after the mediators are included. Seven standard demographic covariates not shown. Older people felt cooler ($\beta = -.09$) and those with greater education ($\beta = .11$) felt warmer toward communist countries.

ferences between US liberals and conservatives over income redistribution would also help account for their overall differences over communism. "Fundamentally there are only two ways of coordinating the economic activity of millions," Milton Friedman (2002 [1962], 13) wrote in *Capitalism and Freedom*. "One is central direction involving the use of coercion—the technique of the army and of the modern totalitarian state. The other is voluntary co-operation of individuals—the technique of the marketplace." The same disagreements that economic liberals and conservatives have about taxes, social welfare spending, and income redistribution at home, our survey data suggest, also influence Americans' feelings toward "communist countries" abroad.

The division between libertarians and communitarians at home also shapes feelings toward communist countries abroad, as the bottom path in Figure 2 reveals. In his *The Broken Covenant*, sociologist

Robert Bellah (1992 [1975], 124) argued that although many Americans dislike communism for economic and religious reasons, it is communism's perceived threat to cherished American liberties that stings the most. "Though 'revolutionary' and 'atheistic' would continue to be negative terms used to characterize socialism, it was the attribute of collectivism or statism, in contrast to allegedly American individualism, that would be the central negative image." Remarkably, our 2011 survey data exactly confirm Bellah's argument that there are three (economic, religio-cultural, and libertarian) distinct ideological ways that Americans think about communism. Historian Andrew Preston (2012, 101) has more recently but similarly argued that a libertarian ethic rooted in Protestantism "made Americans suspicious about other nations that relied too heavily upon concentrations of power, be they religious (the Catholic Church) or political and economic (the Communist Party)." Libertarians don't like democratic governments, let alone centralized communist party-states.

Conservative US antipathy toward communist countries is thus overdetermined. Whether seen as atheistic and a threat to Christian values, redistributionist and a threat to property and the free market, or authoritarian and a threat to individual liberty, different stripes of Main Street conservatives can agree that they dislike communist countries more than their liberal neighbors.

Liberal Panda-Huggers and Conservative Dragon-Slayers

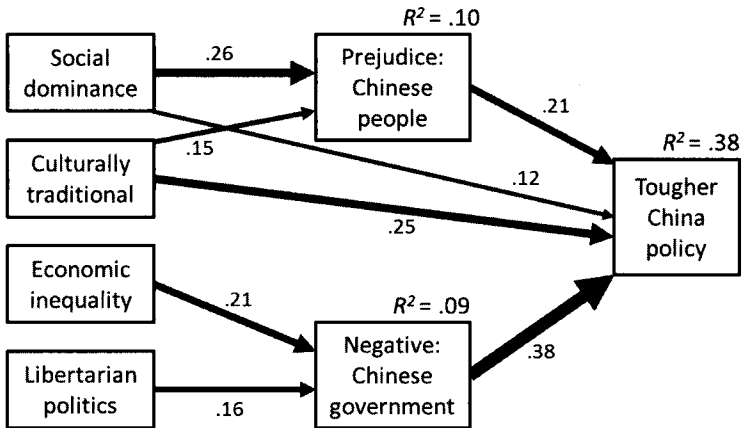
Broad feelings about "Asians" and "communist countries" thus help account for more specific feelings toward the Chinese people and their government, respectively, contributing to ideological differences in China policy preferences (see Figure 1). When confronted with difficult specific questions like "How much do you agree or disagree with the statement, 'The US government should pursue a tougher China policy?'," we frequently resort to "affect heuristics," substituting easier and broader questions about our gut feelings like, "How do I feel about Asians?" or "How do I feel about communists?" Such heuristic devices, social psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011, 97) has argued, help us "generate intuitive opinions on complex matters." This helps explain how Main Street Americans, in the absence of much knowledge about China, can nonetheless form consistent—if consistently different—opinions about it (see also Gries, Crowson, and Cai 2011; Gries 2014, 129–131).

So why do US liberals and conservatives differ so systematically in their intuitive opinions about China? The path model in Figure 3 reveals that all four of the dimensions of US ideology that we measured shaped China policy preferences—and in the same direction. In other words, conservatives of different stripes may disagree over why they desire a tougher China policy than liberals do, but they can agree on a tougher policy. Similarly, different kinds of liberals may differ over why they want a friendlier China policy than conservatives do, but they agree on a relatively friendly policy. The magnitude of the US ideological divide over China policy is due in part to this synergy of ideologies.

Figure 3 also reveals that negative attitudes toward the Chinese *people* (prejudice) and *government* act as distinct pathways for our four dimensions of US ideology to shape China policy preferences. First, the top path in Figure 3 reveals that the same socioracial politics that divide Americans today on domestic issues like affirmative action also shape their feelings toward the Chinese people ($\beta = .26$), and subsequent policy preferences toward China ($\beta = .21$). But social dominance orientation—the belief that “inferior groups should stay in their place”—has no impact on attitudes toward the Chinese government.

This clash of socioracial ideologies was on display in a 2011 controversy over Rush Limbaugh’s derogatory parody of Chinese President Hu Jintao speaking Chinese. On his January 19, 2011, radio show, Limbaugh spoke of watching an Obama-Hu press conference: “Hu Jintao, he was speaking, and they weren’t translating . . . Hu Jintao was just going . . . ‘chin chang chin chan chong chang chi bababba chi chike zhing zha zhe zhike rrooor ji kedi ba baba.’” Limbaugh’s racist gibberish immediately produced a liberal outcry. “Calling the Chinese names and imitating the Chinese language was a childish and offensive tactic,” said Democratic Congresswoman Judy Chu of California, the first Chinese American woman elected to the US House of Representatives. “It is one thing to disagree with a nation and criticize its policies, but it is another thing to demonize an entire people. Over the last 150 years, Chinese in America have faced severe racial discrimination. It wasn’t that long ago that the Chinese in America were . . . called racial slurs, were spat upon in the streets, derided in the halls of Congress and even brutally murdered” (Khan 2011). Our survey data suggest that Limbaugh and Chu were not media and political elites divorced from Main Street: differing beliefs about proper racial and social hierarchies continue to divide the aver-

Figure 3 Four Reasons Why Conservatives Desire Tougher China Policies Than Liberals Do



Source: University of Oklahoma Political Psychology of US-China Relations research lab.

Notes: A path model. All p 's < .001. To reduce clutter, covariances and prediction error terms are not displayed. All three China measures are three-item scales. Model fit was excellent and all indirect paths displayed were statistically significant. See Appendixes 1 and 2 for detailed statistics.

age US liberal and conservative today in their gut feelings toward Chinese people.

Second, Figure 3 reveals that *cultural* liberals and conservatives also differ in their views of both the Chinese people and US China policy. For cultural conservatives, Chinese immigrants may be viewed as a threat to traditional WASP (white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant) values, contributing to anti-Chinese prejudice ($\beta = .15$) and subsequent desires for tougher China policies ($\beta = .21$). The stronger direct path ($\beta = .25$) from cultural conservatism to preferences for tougher China policies may reflect a fear-driven response to a rising China seen as different and dangerous. Social psychologists have demonstrated that when confronted by perceived threats to shared cultural beliefs, values, or norms, cultural conservatives are more likely than cultural liberals to respond with aggression (see Duckitt and Sibley 2007; Jost 2006).

Many cultural conservatives advocate tougher China policies. As noted earlier, Republican Congressman Christopher Smith deplors

the persecution of Christians in China. Smith serves as cochair of the House Pro-Life Caucus and as a member of its Taiwan Caucus, which generally promotes tougher China policies. Smith is not unusual in linking these seemingly disparate issues. Our 2011 survey included the abortion question, "Are you more pro-life or pro-choice?" Answers to this intensely personal question were a substantial predictor ($\beta = .22$) of China policy preferences, even after controlling for the standard demographic variables.

Third, *economic* ideology, by contrast, has no influence on feelings toward the Chinese people. Its effect on China policy preferences is instead mediated through feelings toward the Chinese government ($\beta = .21$; see Figure 3, near bottom left). Not surprisingly, liberal-conservative disagreements over whether "the government should decrease income differences" also shape their attitudes toward the "communist" Chinese government. While business conservatives often support pro-China policies out of a material self-interest in profiting from trade and access to the China market, economic conservatism as an ideology is marked by an antipathy toward governments—especially socialist governments—that tax, spend, or redistribute income, all seen as violations of free market principles and threats to property.

Wall Street Journal editorials on China often serve as proxy battles in domestic economic wars. "While it must be tempting to goose GDP once more, Mr. Wen and his colleagues should think twice about another round of stimulus," the *WSJ* editorial board argued in their May 23, 2012, article "China Is Stimulused Out." "Now is not the time to try to reflate the economy with more wasteful spending and investment." Liberal economists, by contrast, were more inclined to praise Chinese efforts at economic stimulus during the global financial crisis in 2008–2009 (e.g., Krugman 2010). Our 2011 data reveal that elite *WSJ* and *New York Times* editorialists were not out of touch with the diverging economic views of the US public.

Fourth, like economic ideology, *communitarian-libertarian political* ideology is not associated with prejudice against the Chinese people; instead, it shapes feelings toward the Chinese government ($\beta = .16$; see bottom left of Figure 3). Greater libertarian agreement that "individuals should be free to follow their own dreams in their own ways, without interference from government" is associated with suspicion and hostility toward the US government, which is democratic. It is not surprising, therefore, that Main Street libertarians would also

tend to feel cooler than communitarians toward the Chinese government, which is authoritarian.

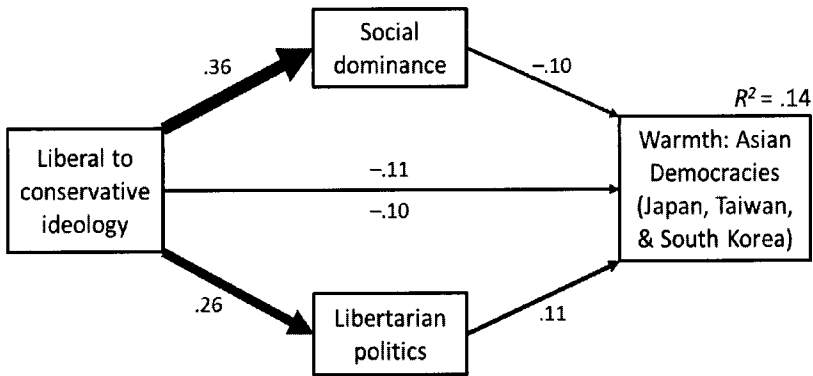
Communitarianism-libertarianism also appears to divide US political elites over China. “Remember, there are reasons why Communist China remains under an arms embargo,” Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (2009) of California said at a congressional hearing on export controls. “The Tiananmen Square massacre, where the tyrannical and brutal Chinese government murdered thousands of peaceful reformers, changed the course of history.” Note both the reference to “Communist China” and the clear distinction drawn between the “tyrannical and brutal Chinese government” and the Chinese people, described as “peaceful reformers.” Libertarians, Figure 3 reveals, do not harbor prejudices against the Chinese people. Their antipathy, instead, is directed against governments, especially strong authoritarian governments like communist China’s.

“Free Asia” and the “Yellow Peril”

What influence does ideology have on Americans’ feelings toward the East Asian democracies of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea? Statistical analysis revealed that of the four dimensions of US ideology that we measured in our survey, only social dominance orientation and communitarian-libertarian political ideology mediated the relationship between ideology and warmth toward these three East Asian democracies (see Figure 4). But these two indirect effects, though each statistically significant, canceled each other out at the aggregate level. As we will see below, if it were not for the fact that conservatives on average tend to be more libertarian than liberals, and libertarians like democracies, conservatives would feel relatively cooler toward East Asia’s democracies.

Higher average conservative than liberal social dominance orientation ($\beta = .36$)—agreement that “inferior groups should stay in their place”—contributed to greater conservative *coolness* ($\beta = -.10$) toward Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea ($\alpha = .80$). Chinese are thus not the only Asian objects of prejudice in the United States today. “It’s because of you little motherfuckers that we’re out of work!” Ronald Ebens yelled at Vincent Chin outside a nightclub in Detroit in 1982. Ebens, an autoworker, thought that Chin, a Chinese American, was Japanese, and hence the source of Detroit’s economic woes. Ebens and his stepson, Michael Nitz, tracked Chin down later that

Figure 4 Libertarian Warmth Counteracts Racial Coolness in Conservative Feelings Toward Asian Democracies



Source: University of Oklahoma Political Psychology of US-China Relations research lab.

Notes: A mediation model involving a suppression effect. All p 's < .001. Both indirect effects were statistically significant, but the total indirect effect was not. See Appendix 1. Coefficients above the horizontal line (here: $\beta = -.11$) reflect the unmediated relationship; those below the horizontal (here: $\beta = -.10$) reflect what remains after the mediators are included. Seven demographic covariates not shown.

night and bludgeoned him to death with a baseball bat. Shockingly, Ebens and Nitz were not sentenced to prison time, provoking Asian American outrage and greater Asian American involvement in the civil rights movement (Wu 2010).

Thirty years later, Assistant Attorney General Thomas E. Perez (2012) of the US Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division marked Chin's death by writing, "In a diverse, democratic nation like ours, we all must be able to live and work in our communities without fear of being attacked because of how we look, what we believe, where we are from, or who we love." Differences among Americans today about proper race relations at home, our survey reveals, shape their feelings not just toward China, but toward Asian democracies as well.

Greater average conservative libertarianism ($\beta = .26$), however, contributed to slightly greater conservative *warmth* toward these Asian democracies ($\beta = .11$), suppressing the overall effect of a con-

servative ideology on coolness toward Asian democracies. In mediation analyses a “suppression effect” occurs when the inclusion of a mediator (in Figure 4’s bottom path: libertarianism) increases rather than decreases, or changes the direction of, the direct relationship between two variables (normally, the inclusion of a statistically significant mediator reduces the direct relationship, thus accounting for part of it; see Rucker et al. 2011). For libertarians, the success of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea may represent the triumph of freedom in East Asia. When promoting the democratization of the Middle East, President George W. Bush (2001, 2003) frequently extolled Japan and Germany as “great democracies”, capable of “sustaining democratic values.” “Today the great powers are also increasingly united by common values, instead of divided by conflicting ideologies. The United States, Japan and our Pacific friends, and now all of Europe, share a deep commitment to human freedom,” Bush (2002) declared in a commencement address at West Point. “And the tide of liberty is rising.”

Taiwan—“Free China”—has also long been held up by US libertarians as a beacon of liberty in the Chinese world. “Taiwan is one of the strongest democratic partners of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region and serves as a model of freedom and democracy,” Republican Senator Jim Inhofe (2008) of Oklahoma wrote. Although the state of Oklahoma has few commercial or other ties with Taiwan, Inhofe has served on the Senate Taiwan Caucus from its founding in 2003. Supporting Taiwan appears to be a way for some US politicians to express their antipathy toward communist China. “I want to express my strong support for Taiwan,” Republican Congressman Michael McCaul of Texas declared in 2009. “We like our independence in Texas and I think that’s what we have in common. America stands for freedom and democracy and the fight against oppression and dictatorships. And so we stand with you” (Lowther 2009). The 2012 Republican Party Platform (GOP 2012, 48) similarly claims that “America and Taiwan are united in our shared belief in fair elections, personal liberty, and free enterprise.”

Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea thus appear to receive a libertarian boost for being democratic and/or capitalist that counteracts the negative influence of lingering racism among some conservatives. Turning to South Asia, India receives a similar democratic/capitalist boost: greater libertarian warmth ($\beta = .07$) toward India partially counteracts the negative influence of racism/social dominance ($\beta = -.14$) on Americans’ feelings toward India. The suppression effect of

greater conservative libertarianism helps explain why the ideological gap between liberals and conservatives on these Asian democracies is much smaller than that between them over communist countries like China. "It seems that by juxtaposing these two oriental peoples [Chinese and Japanese] Americans had found a means of keeping their hopes and anxieties in equilibrium," historian Michael Hunt (2009 [1987], 77) surmised. "While oriental villains served as the lightning rod of American racial fears, more worthy Orientals could be summoned up to keep alive liberal dreams of a prosperous, stable, and democratic East Asia." Our survey data support Hunt's historical analysis: while a "Yellow Peril" inflects US views of all of Asia, "Free Asia" is juxtaposed against "Red China" in the US imagination today.

Main Street, Wall Street, and US China Policy

In this article I have argued that while conservatives feel somewhat cooler toward the East Asian democracies than liberals do, they feel much cooler toward China than liberals do. I further argued that the sources of these ideological differences in attitudes toward Asian countries can be found in many of the same issues that divide liberals and conservatives over domestic politics.

One source of greater overall conservative coolness toward Asian countries is their slightly greater average prejudice. "I think one man is just as good as another so long as he's honest and decent and not a nigger or a Chinaman," future president Harry Truman wrote in 1911. "Negroes ought to be in Africa, yellow men in Asia and white men in Europe and America" (cited in Leuchtenburg 1991). While such overt prejudice has clearly declined over the last century, our survey reveals that it does persist, and that slightly greater average conservative than liberal prejudice against Asians has a small but significant influence on Americans' attitudes toward Asian countries.

But communism was a much larger source of ideological differences over East Asia. For cultural, social, economic, and political reasons, conservatives felt cooler than liberals toward both communist countries in general and the Chinese government in particular. By contrast, greater libertarianism counteracted greater conservative prejudice toward the Asian democracies of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, attenuating the overall liberal-conservative ideological divide.

If ideology powerfully divides Main Street Americans over China, why is that division not more clearly reflected among political elites on Capitol Hill?

Public opinion is not the sole driver of US China policy. Campaign contributors and special interest groups can exert an independent influence on members of both the legislative and executive branches. It may be that the pro-China advocacy of business groups like the US-China Business Council and AmCham China has been able to neutralize the anti-China leanings of congressional Republicans and their conservative constituents. Similarly, the anti-China advocacy of Big Labor has likely counteracted the greater liberal warmth toward China within the rank and file of the Democratic Party as a whole.

Will this delicate balance endure? While politicians from both political parties have long sought to use China against their political opponents in their campaigns, Republican politicians today appear to have begun utilizing anti-China tactics against their Democratic opponents more frequently. Republican campaign ads increasingly invoke the “Red Menace” and “Yellow Horde” views of China, appealing to the greater conservative antipathy toward both communism and Asians that our survey data clearly reveal. For instance, Michigan Republican Pete Hoekstra ran an ad during the 2012 Super Bowl depicting an Asian actress speaking broken English: “Your economy get very weak. Ours get very good.” Hoekstra sought to depict his Democratic opponent as “Debbie spend it now” while he was “Pete spend it not” (Weinger 2012). Hoekstra was appealing to the anti-Chinese and anti-big government sentiments of conservative Michigan voters.

Recent changes in the US electoral system suggest that polarized public opinion over China could come to play a larger role in the making of US China policy. The “electoral connection” ensures that politicians who want to be reelected will pay careful attention to the international attitudes of their core constituents (Aldrich et al. 2006). For the most part, however, the views of the average voter no longer matter to our elected politicians. The “median voter” (Downs 1957) is less and less relevant today because the majority of House and Senate districts have become hyperpartisan. The South’s partisan realignment, begun during the civil rights movement, is now largely complete (Valentino and Sears 2005). And Americans are increasingly choosing to live in communities of the like-minded: liberals on the coasts or in big cities, conservatives in the heartland or the sub-

urbs (Bishop with Cushing 2008). With this ideological self-sorting and gerrymandering, the majority of congressional districts today have become so deeply blue or red that the general election outcome has become a foregone conclusion. Statistician Nate Silver (2012) estimates that just 8 percent of House districts today are competitive, while a remarkable 56 percent are "landslide districts."

The action in US electoral politics today is therefore largely in the primaries. And primary voters, Gary Jacobson (2012, 1625) has shown, are more ideologically extreme than general election voters, especially in the Republican Party. To avoid being "primaried," therefore, politicians today increasingly pander to the ideological extremes of their parties. This exacerbates conflict and gridlock, not just on domestic economic and cultural issues like the budget and abortion but on foreign policy issues like China as well.

Meanwhile, pro-China business groups, so united in the 1990s as apologists for China during the fight against President Clinton over China's most-favored nation status, may now be dividing over China. During the global financial crisis in 2008–2009, the Chinese government made the case to its people that the Chinese economic model was superior to the West's, contributing to greater Chinese assertiveness and tougher policies toward the Western business world. "In my more than two decades in China, I have seldom seen the foreign business community more angry and disillusioned than it is today," China business expert James McGregor (2010) wrote for *Time* magazine. "Anti-foreign attitudes and policies in China have been growing and hardening since the global economic crisis."

This recent development raises an important question. If business Republicans become internally divided over China policy and stop counterbalancing the anti-China leanings of Main Street conservatives and their elected representatives, what is to keep the Republican Party from moving toward a substantially tougher China policy? We may be poised for a significant change in the politics of China policy on Capitol Hill.

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Appendix 1 Indirect Effect Statistics for Mediation Analyses

	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Intervals ^a	
		Lower	Upper
Figure 1. Ideology to China policy (mixed)			
Total indirect effects	.2119	.1655	.2625
Via Asians only	-.0031 ^{ns}	-.0140 ^{ns}	.0037 ^{ns}
Via Asians and prejudice against Chinese	.0194	.0074	.0350
Via prejudice against Chinese only	.0712	.0470	.1008
Via Asians and Chinese government	.0015 ^{ns}	-.0002 ^{ns}	.0046 ^{ns}
Via communism only	.0741	.0422	.1076
Via communism and Chinese government	.0531	.0392	.0713
Via Chinese government only	.0516	.0263	.0867
Via communism and prejudice against Chinese	.0065	.0021	.0125
Figure 2. Ideology to communist countries (simultaneous)			
Total indirect effects	-4.6317	-6.1626	-3.0556
Via cultural traditionalism	-2.3837	-3.3066	-1.3569
Via economic inequality	-1.5769	-2.9611	-.3236
Via libertarian politics	-.6711	-1.1692	-.2637
Figure 3. Four ideologies to China policy (path)			
From social dominance via prejudice	.0519	.0330	.0751
From cultural traditionalism via prejudice	.0316	.0146	.0522
From economic inequality via negative: government	.0792	.0557	.1057
From libertarian politics via negative: government	.0586	.0299	.0857
Figure 4. Ideology to Asian democracies (simultaneous)			
Total indirect effects	-.0214 ^{ns}	-.6601 ^{ns}	.6768 ^{ns}
Via social dominance	-.7171	-1.1816	-.2521
Via libertarian politics	.6957	.3119	1.1694

Notes: a. Bias corrected with 1,000 bootstrapped samples.
ns = nonsignificant.

Appendix 2 Model Fit Statistics for China Policy Path Model

Model	χ^2	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Figure 3	15.85	.026	7	2.27	.993	.978	.036
“Good fit” conventions ^a		> .05		< 2, 3	≥ .95	≥ .95	≤ .06

Notes: χ^2 = chi-square; *p* = significance level; *df* = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

a. See Kline 2005.

Notes

1. ANES 2010 questions C1_V1A and C1_PP012. See ICPSR 32701 at icpsr.umich.edu.

2. While the means don't change much in the 2010 ANES data, the standard deviation for the "very" wording ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.69$) is larger than with the "extremely" wording ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.45$), Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for differences between distributions, goodness-of-fit = 1.90, $p < .001$. Levene's test for homogeneity of variance = 39.17, $p < .001$. In other words, "extremely" has artificially reduced dispersion from the mean.

3. $F(1, 419) = 64.97$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$, controlling for seven standard demographic variables.

4. Feelings toward Taiwan: $F(1, 420) = 6.94$, $p = .009$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$; South Korea: $F(1, 420) = 6.00$, $p = .015$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$; Japan: $F(1, 420) = 10.75$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, controlling for the seven standard demographics.

5. $F(1, 419) = 89.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$, controlling for the seven standard demographics. Cronbach's α range from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating greater internal consistency.

6. $F(1, 419) = 14.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$.

7. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this question.

8. The Chicago Council's feeling thermometer solicits feelings toward a list of "countries and peoples," conflating two distinct attitude objects.

9. Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$ and $.79$, respectively. Together with the three-item China policy scale introduced above, these two three-item scales were used in all the mediation, path, and structural equation models in this article.

10. $t(999) = 34.29$, $p < .001$. Cohen's $d = 1.05$.

11. $F(1, 419) = 24.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$ and $F(1, 419) = 59.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$, controlling for the seven standard demographics.

12. $F(1, 419) = 6.40$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$ and $F(1, 419) = 89.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$, controlling for the seven standard demographics.

13. The direct effect was reduced from 10.9 percent (semipartial correlation = .33) to 2.8 percent (semipartial correlation = .17) with the inclusion of the four mediators.

14. The only crossover between the two paths was that warmth toward communist countries had a small impact ($\beta = -.12$) on prejudice, although it was overwhelmed by the impact of feelings toward Asians ($\beta = -.56$).

15. A principal axis factor analysis with Promax rotation and Kaiser normalization. The scree plot revealed a clear break after the fourth factor, and all four Eigenvalues were greater than one. The reverse coded SDO item factored together with the three economic items, likely due to a method effect: two of them were also reverse coded. The other twelve items loaded cleanly (no cross loadings greater than .228) and strongly (all loads greater than .504) onto the correct factor.

16. The direct effect was reduced from 8.8 percent (semipartial correlation = -.296) to just 0.8 percent (semipartial correlation = -.09).

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