Understanding Indian Public Opinion Toward China: Evidence from Seven Decades of Survey Data*

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Abstract

India is increasingly important in world politics, yet we know little about how Indians view international affairs. This paper analyzes a unique collection of Indian public opinion data about China spanning seven decades. The paper compares evidence from India to theories in the existing OECD-focused literature, making an empirical contribution to the study of India in IR and identifying where India aligns with/diverges from existing conventional wisdom. We find that India's "foreign policy public" is broadly similar to that of OECD countries, and non-representative of broader public. More surprisingly, we show that domestic political cleavages shaping public opinion are quite different in India, depending more on region, and less on partisanship. We provide tentative evidence that Indians who offer survey responses have sophisticated, coherent opinions, that do not seem to mechanistically reflect elite priorities. Our findings have implications for research on India, and IR more broadly.

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Introduction

India's relationship with China came into grim focus as a lethal border struggle began in the spring of 2020. Armed clashes in the Himalayas have occurred regularly throughout India and China's long and complex history, but high casualty counts and long duration in the 2020-2022 Ladakh Crisis have pushed the countries' rocky history—from friendship in the 1950s to war in the 1960s, growing economic ties in the Cold War followed by growing tensions in the 21st Century—back into the headlines. Though tension between China and India is nominally about territorial disputes in relatively forbidding and inhospitable territory, any military conflict between two nuclear-armed states raises the possibility of dangerous escalation with broad implications for global security (Tellis and Blackwill, 2019; Madan, 2020).

Across ups and downs in high politics, we know relatively little about how India's public views this consequential relationship. Understanding the foreign policy attitudes of India's voters is not only important because India-China relations have system-wide consequences, but also because investigating Indian attitudes toward China presents a new opportunity to reflect on influential theories about public opinion on foreign policy. To these ends, this paper addresses two broad questions. First, what patterns characterize Indian citizen's attitudes about China, a major geopolitical rival? How has aggregate public opinion changed over time, what forces shape it, and whose attitudes does "public opinion" reflect? Second, how well are these descriptive patterns explained by a literature on public opinion and IR primarily developed and tested with evidence from a small number of rich, developed democracies? Do the mechanics of foreign policy opinion in India look similar to or dissimilar from foreign policy opinions in the Western countries that have been the dominant areas of study in the past?

To answer these questions, we assemble an unparalleled range of public opinion data, drawing from over four dozen large surveys conducted in India across a span of sixty years. The surveys include newly-recovered historical data from United States Information Agency polls as early as 1958, as well as modern, nationally diverse scientific surveys from Pew and Gallup in the 2010s. Together, they comprise the most comprehensive set of public opinion data on foreign policy analyzed in the political science literature.

We find four important patterns in the attitudes that India's public expresses about China. First, looking at longitudinal change across decades of survey data, we show that coherent foreign

policy attitudes—generally tracking the state of the Sino-Indian political relationship—exist for at least a subset of India’s democratic public as early as the late 1950s. Interestingly, aggregate public opinion sometimes diverges from the policy positions promoted by powerful national political figures like Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Narendra Modi.

Second, we show that individual-level foreign policy attitudes are not structured by the same national partisan forces highlighted in U.S- and Europe-focused literature. In recent surveys from the 2010s, party affiliation has at best a complicated relationship with attitudes toward China. Supporters of India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) do not, on average, hold different opinions about China than supporters of other parties. But the attitudes of BJP supporters vary substantially across regions. An enduring and robust *regional* cleavage in attitudes toward China is a feature of Indian opinion more broadly. As in the existing literature from other cases, there is evidence that group-level identities and attachments matter – but the nature of these attachments is quite different in India.

Third, we show a persistent trend in who comprises the Indian “public” that expresses foreign policy opinions. Echoing findings from American politics (Berinsky, 2004), we find that propensity to respond to foreign policy survey questions is associated with higher levels of education and wealth. Across surveys, Indians with more formal education are systematically more likely to offer opinions about China and other foreign policy. In India, as elsewhere, public opinion on foreign policy disproportionately reflects the attitudes of a select group—a comparatively educated and advantaged “foreign policy public”—not the Indian public in general.

Fourth, we show that there are important limits to how sensitive and responsive public attitudes are—even among this “foreign policy public.” We compare surveys taken before and after multiple non-fatal border clashes and show that these events, which experts considered at the time to pose meaningful escalatory risks, are essentially under the radar for the public. Crises in 1987, 2013, and 2017 appear to have had negligible effects on Indian attitudes toward China, suggesting that there are limits to public attention toward foreign policy. “Shocks” on their own do not appear to have distinctive short-term effects; if anything, they fit into longer-term patterns of change.

This article proceeds in eight sections. We first review the state of the literature on public opinion and foreign policy in the “West” and India. We introduce the breadth of survey data used in our analyses. We then use the data to show the four patterns mentioned above: over-time trends

in attitudes, the correlates of individual attitudes, the correlates of response and non-response. We conclude, in a final section, with implications for research and policy.

Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in the Literature

Public opinion research has long identified a distinction between “hard” issues for opinion formation and issues that are “easy” (Pollock et al., 1993). Because foreign policy considerations are relatively remote from the daily experiences of most democratic citizens and perhaps harder issues in general (Rosenau, 1965), a vibrant literature has sought to identify the sources of foreign policy opinions, adjudicate whether expressed opinions are coherent, and argue about whether public opinion constrains foreign policy in practice.

Two recent schools of thought are particularly relevant for interpreting evidence from India. One holds that democratic citizens have relatively coherent attitudes about foreign policy issues (Holsti, 1992; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Kertzer, 2013; Rathbun et al., 2016), and that their attitudes may not substantially differ from the attitudes of elites and experts (Mattes and Weeks, 2019; Kertzer, 2020).³ This school suggests that citizens can hold meaningful, coherent views on issues including reconciliation with historic enemies (Mattes and Weeks, 2019), use of military force (Tomz, Weeks, and Yahri-Milo, 2020), distaste for casualties (Mueller, 1971), and a preference for multilateralism (Chaudoin et al., 2010). A dissenting view holds that the appearance of coherent public opinion is created by *cueing*. Citizens in democracies do not form foreign policy opinions so much as they adopt them from trusted sources, typically political leaders (Berinsky, 2007, 2009; Baum and Groeling, 2009; Guisinger and Saunders, 2017; Saunders, 2018), media elites (Zaller, 1992), or, per Kertzer and Zeitzoff (2017), social peers.

Beyond the content of public opinion, some literature in American politics identifies systematic differences in the backgrounds of people who express opinions in the first place. People who respond to surveys—the “opinionated public”—are often wealthier, better educated, and likely to hold different opinions than those who respond “don’t know” (Berinsky, 2004). This suggests that the “public” that foreign policy scholars study are a comparatively advantaged, non-random subset of the democratic public at large.

Understanding the source of foreign policy attitudes—both where they come from and who is expressing them—is practically important. Public opinion in democracies can constitute a

³ The earlier of these studies are responding to the early Cold War notion that civilians’ foreign policy opinions were either ill-informed (Almond, 1950) or downright dangerous (Kennan, 2012).

conflict accelerant in some situations and a constraint on military adventurism in others (Fearon, 1994; Schultz, 2001; Caverley, 2014; Kreps et al., 2018; Narang and Staniland, 2018; Mattes and Weeks, 2019; Tomz et al., 2020, among others).

Public Opinion, Domestic Politics, and Foreign Policy in India

We contribute to this debate by examining Indian public opinion about China. Evidence from India is particularly valuable because “the public” in most previous literature, *de facto* refers to the American public, plus occasionally Western Europe or Israel. Comparing evidence from India to theories developed and tested in Western, wealthy, industrialized states lets us explore how well insights from the existing literature travel to other contexts.

We focus on attitudes about China because the Sino-Indian relationship has substantial international security implications, and because the long and complex history of interactions between India and China allows us to explore variation over time. Unlike relations with Pakistan, which are essentially always adversarial, the Sino-Indian relationship has had extended periods of both hostility and more-cooperative relations. Further, well-documented variation in elite attitudes over time provide an opportunity to observe whether public opinion responds to elites’ changing strategies.

Ours is not the first study of how domestic politics and foreign policy interact in India. Among many, Sasikumar and Verniers (2013) study the curious case of the US-India nuclear deal, Raghavan (2010) highlights domestic pressures on Nehru before the 1962 war with China, Hymans (2006) ties domestic nationalist projects to nuclear proliferation, Gaikwad and Suryanarayan (2021) show that caste hierarchy shapes views of globalization, Blarel and van Willigen (2020) explore how public opinion is manifested through federalism, Ogden (2010) and Hall (2019) study the impact of Hindu nationalism on foreign policy, Plagemann and Destradi (2019) link populism to shifts in the making of India’s foreign policy, and Narang and Staniland (2018) argue that “accountability environments” vary across governments and issues in India.

Despite clear interest in how domestic politics affect India’s foreign policy, there is limited research on public opinion about foreign policy in India. Some studies use elite surveys (Cortright and Mattoo, 1996; Ganguly et al., 2016), which are valuable in their own right but say little about the general public. Prefiguring the trends we identify below, the most influential public opinion studies (Kapur 2009, 2015; Lalwani et al., 2022), finds striking differences in response rates across

different socioeconomic strata. Other major public opinion surveys in India (like a series from the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies) include few foreign policy questions, reflecting, perhaps an assumption that foreign policy is peripheral to India's domestic politics.

Data: 60 Years of Indian Attitudes

We address this shortcoming by assembling a large body of evidence from historical and modern surveys. We present, to our knowledge, the most comprehensive analysis of existing surveys, including little-used historical survey data from the Cold War. First, we compile a series of polls from 1958-1988 run by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion with funding from the United States Information Agency. We then turn to modern, nationally-representative, scientific surveys, primarily the Gallup World Poll and Pew Global Attitudes surveys, run nearly annually since 2006.

Historical Data: The Indian Institute of Public Opinion Series

Indian Institute of Public Opinion's (IIOPO) surveys between 1959-1988 covered views of foreign countries and, more irregularly, particular foreign policy issues. IIOPO surveys show how opinion toward China changed from the late 1950s through the end of the Cold War. Exploring longitudinal change in opinion this period is usually difficult because polling was largely inconsistent, and the few consistent studies (like India's National Election Survey) did not usually cover foreign policy. The IIOPO surveys, especially the "International Images" series, are an important exception. International Images surveys were fielded annually or biannually, and focused mainly on international issues, especially respondents' views of foreign countries.

We began by cataloging every foreign policy question in IIOPO surveys (catalog will be released upon publication; more information in Appendix A). Questions ranged from relatively prosaic—assessments of India's relationships with France—to more unusual—how can India balance Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence with nuclear weapon acquisition? The real value of IIOPO data is consistency: many key questions are asked repeatedly, using the same language, across decades.

Though valuable, IIOPO data are certainly not perfect. Most surveys cover only four major metros (Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai), and have only moderate sample sizes (1,000-1,500 in total). Surveys in the 1950s were not conducted with the sophisticated sampling frames now common in opinion research, so most samples are disproportionately literate and well-educated compared to even urban standards. Comparing these studies the few IIOPO studies that include

nationally-diverse samples (or at least a broader set of metro areas) gives some confidence that the standard four-city polls provide a reasonable picture of educated urban opinion in India broadly. In a 1966 survey covering state capitals, IIOPO reported that “The results, however, show ... the metropolitan cities here currently reflect urban opinion in large cities” (August 1966). Major and minor cities showed similar response rates and similar rates of US, China, and USSR favorability.

While only top-line statistics are available for surveys in the 1950s and 1960s, we use the original, complete, punch-card-format data to conduct modern statistical analyses on IIOPO data starting from the early 1970s. With the caveat that 1970s data are collected using 1970s-era survey methods, we argue that historical polls provide extremely useful information on historical attitudes about foreign policy in India.

Modern Scientific Polling

Starting in the 2000s, we measure attitudes using modern scientific surveys. We focus on China-related questions in surveys by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA) in 2006, Pew Global Attitudes in the 2010s, and Gallup World Polls from 2006-18. These surveys more closely approximate national representation in demographic and geographic terms.⁴ While they all ask key questions about attitudes toward China, question wording and covariate availability is less consistent than in IIOPO data—both between survey firms and over time within single firms (See Appendix B).

Foreign Policy Attitudes Show Coherence Over Time

In this section we examine trends in views of China during the Cold War and then from 2006-2018. We cover periods of dramatic change in India and China’s bilateral relationship, which are also periods of substantial change in Indian domestic politics. We combine over-time analysis of similarly worded questions with complementary one-off survey questions to track aggregate opinion over time.

Cold War Trends

The earliest survey data comes from run-up and aftermath of the 1962 war between India and China. Unfortunately, the “International Images” series we use to measure post-1965 favorability of China did not include China prior to the 1962 war. Other one-off surveys, though,

⁴ Few surveys are “nationally-representative” in India because true national representation is cost prohibitive. A common standard is representation across India’s 14 “Major states,” leaving out the (small) Union Territories and the 7 Northeastern states.

give a sense of pre-war opinion toward China. A 1957 survey showed 73% approval for admitting China to the UN and only 3% opposition (Vol. 2, p. 38) and broadly favorable views of Chinese premier Chou En Lai (15% Very Good, 25% Good, 6% Bad, 52% Don't Know).

After lethal border clashes in October 1959 and Nehru's public release of a white paper on the dispute, opposition parties in the Lok Sabha began to put pressure on the government, raising the public profile of the territorial disputes with China (Raghavan 2010). The crisis escalated, culminating in war in November 1962. In August 1962, an all-India urban area poll (overrepresenting literate men) asked a set of questions about China and the border dispute, providing fascinating evidence of urban opinion merely months before a devastating war (Vol. 8, p. 46-47). 78.7% of respondents answered that the border dispute had changed their opinion of China for the worse, with only 12.8% offering a "Don't Know" response. Moreover, among those whose views changed for the worse, 66.1% of respondents said that prior to the border crisis, they had "good" opinion of China.

The growing crisis darkened views of China, at least among this relatively well-informed group. Before the war, respondents also expressed satisfaction with the Indian government's policy toward the border dispute, with 69.5% being satisfied, 22.5% dissatisfied, and 8% responding "Don't Know." This is striking since policymakers were facing a virtually unsolvable, self-imposed dilemma—India's "Forward Policy" had left its forces vulnerable to Chinese attacks, even as Indian leadership had publicly committed to not backing down in the crisis (Raghavan 2008). Among those expressing dissatisfaction, a plurality believed that India should *initiate* military action against China—the prevailing critique was that India's strategy was soft, echoing the criticism of Nehru's policy coming from opposition parties on the right.

The 1962 war corresponds with a dramatic change in attitudes toward China. A January 1963 survey of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras tells a "truly dramatic story . . . the image of China has suffered a sharp deterioration" (Vol 8, No. 94, p. 12) compared to an urban all-India October 1961 survey. The 1963 IIOPO report highlighted a dramatic increase in the view that China was "war loving": 68.1% compared to 27.4% two years prior. In 1965 (the year IIOPO standardized the format of favorability questions) the IIOPO summarized its history of survey questions about China, saying: "The early surveys show. . . the People's Republic of China enjoyed a high ranking in Indian opinion. There was, however, in a survey in 1960 an indication that there was danger

from China. The image of China worsened dramatically” by 1963 (IIPO Vol. 10, No. 9-10, p. 44).

We extend this analysis to 1965-1988, using IIPO’s consistently-worded favorability question. Figure 1 shows net favorability levels for the PRC, with the US and USSR for comparison. We see extremely low net favorability toward China in the 1960s which slightly improves into the early 1970s; views become substantially more favorable, though far from effusive, by the 1980s. Don’t Know rates are consistently very low in the 1960s. Over time, Don’t Know rates for China are consistently lower than Don’t Know rates for questions about other non-superpower countries like Australia or Yugoslavia.

Figure 1. Net Favorability of PRC, US, and USSR

The 1962 war left a deep impression on the urban public's views of China, but not a permanent one. Surveys after 1962 show a slow upward trend in favorability as India-China tensions decreased and Chinese foreign and domestic policies were transformed. The “thaw” is probably not elite-driven—India-China relations were not central to India's domestic politics at the time. Other survey questions show broader support for improving ties. In 1973, 42% of respondents support normalization of relations with China and 27% support it as part of a reciprocal process. By 1978, 77% of respondents support normalization, though 50% of that group condition their support on settling the border dispute.

These data suggests that the urban, educated public is aware of broader geopolitical trends in India-China relations, which would support the “pretty prudent public” (Jentleson 1992) theory of public opinion about foreign policy. As India-China ties improved and stabilized, respondents to IIOPO surveys became markedly more positive toward China. Don’t Know rates in polls by this time were fairly low and their distribution across wealth/education categories was stable. The surveys show a public that has awareness of foreign policy issues and holds attitudes that are sensitive to major events. This differs from the picture painted in earlier work on Indian foreign policy that excessively downplayed the attentiveness of the public to foreign policy issues (*inter alia*, Narang and Staniland, 2012).

Views of China since 2005

We use data from Gallup and Pew polls, conducted regularly in the 2000s and 2010s. This allows two different longitudinal analyses of Indian attitudes toward China. In general, both show substantial, and generally growing, skepticism toward China.

Figure 2 shows 2006-2018 Gallup World Poll data on Indian approval rates for China. The approval rate is the proportion of complete responses that indicate approval of the country’s leadership (“Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of this country?”). China’s approval rating only exceeds 50% in 2008—it is consistently lower than approval of the United States in the same period—and generally declines over time.

Figure 2. Gallup Approval Rates of China's Leadership

We see similar over-time changes in favorability toward China in Pew surveys (Figure 3).⁵ The timing of the decline suggests that this trend is not simply the result of border clashes at Depsang in 2013 or Doklam in 2017. Pew's 2012 survey, before either crisis, showed that urban respondents were concerned about the growth of Chinese economic power: 53% viewed China's economic growth as a bad thing, only 26% saw it as a good thing.⁶ Pew's 2017 survey, fielded before the summer Doklam standoff, notes that "a 56% majority in India said China's growing military power is bad for India. A similar 51% believe China's growing economy, with which India

⁵ As a 2019 Pew report notes, 2013-14 survey marked a substantial improvement in survey methods in India, so we need to be careful about interpreting across the entire series. Nevertheless, both before and after the 2013 poll, there is clear evidence of downward trends

⁶ <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2012/09/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Project-India-Report-FINAL-September-10-2012.pdf>, p. 15.

runs a trade deficit, does not bode well for their country.”⁷ 16% of respondents thought China’s growing military was good for India, and 20% felt the same about China’s growing economy.

This evidence suggests a deep-seated skepticism of China. A brief improvement in 2015 may either be the result of new survey methods (fn. 3), or optimism about India’s foreign relations after the new Modi government made energetic international outreach central to his first year in office. In either event, it is followed by a rapid drop thereafter.

Figure 3. % Favorable View of China, Pew

Souring public opinion is surprising. Despite border disputes in 2013 and 2017, not to mention the general phenomenon of China’s rise, India’s political leadership worked very hard until 2020 to maintain a publicly cordial relationship with China. Even after the Doklam stand-off of 2017, Modi held high-publicity summits with Chinese leader Xi Jinping to sustain ties.

⁷ <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/11/Pew-Research-Center-India-Modi-Report-2017.11.15.pdf>, p. 26.

Consistent with India's broader grand strategy, the Modi government sought to avoid direct confrontations with or open balancing against China even while aligning more closely with countries like Japan and the US.

China's favorability diminishes in the 2010s despite elite efforts to maintain a positive relationship. At the same time, Don't Know rates on the China question decline in both Gallup and Pew surveys. The change is not a simple response to dramatic border crises (it starts before the 2010s standoffs), but instead seems motivated by broader concern about rising Chinese power. There is little clear evidence that elite (or partisan) cues drove the decline—it actually seems more likely that elite cues (including the absence of China as a major electoral issue pushed by the dominant BJP) prevented an even faster and more decisive turn against China over the last decade. Indeed, in 2018 Lokniti-CSDS-ABP News polls run in January and May 2018, respondents were split over whether the Modi government was doing a good job dealing with China.⁸

Given growing public skepticism about China, it is little surprise that the public strongly approved of Narendra Modi's turn toward confrontation with China as border disputes escalated in 2020. The order of events is consistent with "pretty prudent public" theory of public opinion, and raises some questions about the power of elite cues. Respondents in Pew surveys repeatedly expressed negative opinions about the underlying military and economic growth in China prior to elite consensus on the issue, suggesting that concern about China's rise might be hard for elites to reverse. Survey results from Lalwani et al (2022) confirm this trend of skepticism toward China. At the same time, there remains substantial space for elites to shape public narrative. For instance, the government seems to have successfully shaped narratives about the effectiveness of India's response to the 2020 Chinese border incursions, and Modi's approval rating has not been by the revelation that an apparent intelligence failure by India's security forces precipitated the crisis.⁹ Nevertheless, consolidated skepticism of China in the Indian public may limit the "malleability" (Hyde and Saunders 2020) of Indian policy moving forward, perhaps making conciliatory action politically costly at home.

Border Disputes Fall Below the Radar of Public Attention

⁸ http://www.lokniti.org/media/upload_files/Lokniti-ABP-News-Mood-of-the-Nation-Survey-Round-3-May-2018.pdf

⁹ <https://www.indiatoday.in/mood-of-the-nation/story/indians-feel-talks-best-way-to-end-lac-border-dispute-with-china-mood-of-the-nation-poll-1761752-2021-01-22>

While India's urban public is generally attentive to the state of China-India relations, its attention or responsiveness has limits. In this section, we examine public attitudes toward China in narrow windows around border clashes that have occurred since India and China's 1962 border war. Though no Indian soldiers died in the three clashes we examine (this differs from the 2020-2021 Galwan crisis), each was thought at the time to be a "major" episode with dangerous escalatory potential. Evidence from feeling thermometer scores ('warmness' of attitudes toward China) before and after border clashes at Sumdorong Chu in 1986-87, Dalut Beg Oldi in 2013, and the Doklam Plateau in 2017 shows little change at the time of the crises. Only the most recent dispute—the most media-covered dispute—shows significant cooling of attitudes in the year of the crisis. We suggest that if public opinion ever shifts in direct response to acute foreign policy crises, substantial media attention seems like an important precondition.

1986-1987: The Sumdorong Chu Crisis

In 1986 and 1987, the Indian and Chinese armies faced off at Sumdorong Chu on the border between Tibet and the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. The standoff lasted through the winter with no casualties and was eventually resolved diplomatically. Figure 4 shows over-time change in the conditional average of Indian attitudes toward China through the Sumdorong Chu crisis. The points in the graph are estimated temporal effects on attitudes toward China, compared with the "baseline" of Spring 1986. The figure shows the association between the passage of time (before-during-after the crisis) and attitudes toward China, controlling for other predictors of attitudes toward China like education, religion, region, age, and occupation. The Sumdorong Chu crisis seems to have negligible effects on attitudes of the urban public: between Spring 1986 and Spring 1987, when the crisis was ultimately resolved at the political level, opinions toward China holdsteady with net favorability just above zero. To the extent that there are meaningful shifts in the 1986-88 period, they occur well after the crisis is resolved.

Figure 4: Results from a logit model of Indian attitudes toward China. Coefficients measure the change in attitudes associated with time of interview, after controlling for education, religion, age, and region. The crisis runs between mid-year in 1986 and fall 1987.

Sumdorong Chu seems to have barely affected medium-term Indian attitudes toward China, even though it was considered quite serious at the time (Pardesi, 2019). The best explanation is simple: while the crisis lasted months and required high-level political negotiations to settle—India’s foreign minister visited China later in 1987—it likely flew below the radar of even attentive members of the public. The *Times of India*, India’s English language paper of record, mentioned Sumdorong Chu in only 29 articles across the 730 editions published in 1986-87—roughly one mention per month. The phrase appears on the front page five times in total.¹⁰ Another critical security challenge, the then-escalating insurgency in Punjab, was covered over 15 times as much, with at least 460 mentions in the same paper in the same period. Sumdorong Chu did not stand out against other security and foreign policy issues occupying public consciousness in the 1980s.

2013 and 2017: The Dalut Beg Oldi Crisis and the Doklam Plateau

¹⁰ Four front-page mentions describe an “intrusive” Chinese helipad months before the onset of the crisis. A fifth describes the resolution. Searches for the alternative term “Wangdung Ridge” yield only two mentions over the same 730 editions.

Two additional border crises in the 2010s provide further insight into the limits of public attention. Against the backdrop of overall declining favorability in the 2010s, the smaller crisis, Depsang in 2013, does little to darken Indian’s views of China. The larger Doklam crisis in 2017, though, might have accelerated the decline of an already-sour outlook.

In April 2013, the Indian and Chinese militaries engaged in a month-long standoff near Dalut Beg Oldi in disputed territory on the Depsang Plateau before ultimately agreeing on a mutual withdrawal. Figure five shows little change in attitudes toward China in the 2012-2014 window around the dispute. Compared to a 2012 baseline level of “approval of China’s leadership”, Indian respondents in 2014 are not significantly less approving of China.

Figure 5: Results from a logit model of Indian attitudes toward. Coefficients measure the change in attitudes associated with time of interview, after controlling for education, religion, age, and region. The crisis occurs between the two surveys, in 2013.

The next border crisis, the standoff on the Doklam Plateau in 2017, was larger in terms of mobilization and duration than either the Depsang or Sumdorong Chu incidents, but, curiously, it occurred on territory that India has never claimed. In June 2017, Chinese People’s Liberation Army troops began extending a road into territory disputed by China and Bhutan. India dispatched troops to stop road construction, beginning a standoff that lasted through the summer. Heightened tensions led to a brawl in the Western sector (near the site of the deadly 2020-21 dispute) injuring several soldiers on both sides.

Nationally representative surveys from both Gallup and Pew measure public opinion toward China in the leadup to the Doklam crisis (pre-crisis 2017) and then again roughly half a

year after the withdrawal (spring 2018). The Pew data shows a precipitous decline in favorability toward China from 2017 to 2018, though as Figure 6 shows, 2017 numbers were already down from a baseline of 2016. The Gallup poll (not shown) records a precipitous decline between 2016 and pre-crisis 2017, and then the results holding steady from 2017 into 2018.¹¹

Figure 6: Results from a logit model of Indian attitudes toward. Coefficients measure the change in attitudes associated with time of interview, after controlling for education, religion, age, and region. The crisis runs between mid-2017 (after the 2017 survey) and late 2017.

Why might Doklam differ from other crises? Exposure to the Doklam dispute is not randomized in our study, so opinion change could be unrelated, but the difference in public response makes sense in the context of other patterns shown in this paper. Above all, Doklam was a qualitatively larger media event than the previous two shocks. Not only were Indian troops injured in the standoff, but the potential strategic costs of losing were also portrayed as being very high in Indian media. Whereas the Sumdorong Chu crisis was mentioned barely once per month in the Times of India, the Doklam crisis was mentioned *more than once per edition* in 2017, for 387 total mentions in the paper's print version. This may explain why Doklam is more starkly

¹¹ This might be attributable to a difference in question style. Gallup asks about the Leadership of China, whereas Pew asks only for Approval/Disapproval of China.

reflected in public opinion than earlier, less publicized crises. Second, Doklam may be different because of a change in elite media discourse. Though the ruling BJP was careful (pre-2020) to avoid domestically demonizing China, Doklam was framed more nationalistically or confrontationally in Indian media compared to previous, less “newsy” border disputes. Future research examining tone/content of media coverage across different border crises might help explain patterns in public opinion.

Border disputes provide some of the most direct evidence about China and India’s policies toward each other in practice. Compared to the normal fare of official visits, communiques, and new policy rollouts, militarized disputes are highly salient foreign policy events, and relatively easy opportunities for the public to update their opinions about foreign countries. Evidence from surveys around border crises between India and China, however, shows that opinions do not seem to be updated much during these events, especially not without a boost from media coverage.

Education and Income Define the “Foreign Policy Public”

We have shown above that Indian public opinion about China is relatively coherent if not highly sensitive. Coherent public opinion should, in theory, represent an avenue for democratic accountability. But what subset of society constitutes the “opinionated public”? We show, using data from a series of 21st Century Gallup, and Chicago Council on Global Affairs polls, that “public opinion” on foreign policy really means the opinion of a select group. Consistent with evidence about survey response from the United States (Zaller, 1992; Berinsky, 2004; Gillens, 2005), we find that the effective “foreign policy public” in India is a relatively advantaged group within the larger democratic public. This “foreign policy public” is systematically wealthier, more educated, and more urban than the average Indian voter.

Figure 7: Density plot of foreign policy questions from the 2006 CCGA Foreign Policy Poll, arranged by rate of “Don’t Know” or “Refused” responses. The response rates for example “easy” and “hard” foreign policy questions are marked in blue.

Foreign policy questions vary in their level of “difficulty” (Carmines and Stimson, 1980). Difficult questions about foreign policy get answered by fewer respondents than comparatively easier questions.¹² Data from a 2006 survey by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA)—the survey with the greatest range of foreign policy questions—shows response rates declining as question complexity increases. Virtually all respondents answer completely subjective questions, like rating the United States on a “feeling thermometer,” but barely 15% of respondents even make a guess for esoteric political knowledge questions, like naming the U.N. Secretary General. Figure 7 shows the non-response proportion for questions from the 2006 CCGA survey. Using these data, we construct a variable to proxy each respondent’s propensity-to-respond to foreign policy questions by counting the number of foreign policy survey items they decline to answer.

We use the count of refused/declined questions as a measure of foreign policy opinion formation and expression, while noting the warning from Berinsky (2004) that non-response is not

¹² Definitively non-foreign policy questions included in Pew, Gallup, and CCGA polls have extremely low non-response rates. Almost all survey respondents are willing to provide an answer when asked demographic, biographic, and life satisfaction questions. Survey response rates are also quite high for questions about domestic politics.

random, nor orthogonal to the content of the question. Non-response is often associated with a respondent's attitude about the very question they are declining to answer.¹³ We regress the "refusal count" on a variety of demographic and socioeconomic indicators in an OLS model. Results for similar models fit to CCGA and Gallup data (Tables 3 and 4, respectively) show statistically significant associations between response rate and different measures of socioeconomic status. CCGA data suggests that people with more formal education, higher income, and urban residence are more likely to provide substantive answers to foreign policy questions. Gallup data supports similar conclusions: workforce participation, years of schooling, and urban residence are all positively associated with propensity to answer.

These results match popular accounts of who drives the Indian foreign policy discourse as well as predictions drawn from U.S.-focused literature (Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992; Gilens, 2005). Foreign policy opinions expressed in surveys may be coherent, generally reflecting trends in global politics, and ostensibly independent of the views of governing elites, but these opinions characterize a relatively advantaged *minority* of the Indian public. Figure 8 shows the rate at which respondents to the 2006-2018 Gallup World Poll (the longest consistent time-series we analyze) decline to answer a question about approving or disapproving of China. For many years in the late 2000s and early 2010s, over half of respondents decline to answer the question; even in the best years, over 40% of respondents refuse to report their approval of China's leadership—not necessarily among the "hardest" foreign policy questions. This level of non-response, concentrated among a relatively less-educated, less wealthy segment of the population, might be seen as evidence *against* the argument that foreign policy attitudes are structured by elite cues. The people who are theoretically most likely to rely on elite cues to express opinions and engage in politics are, it appears, simply not expressing their views at all.¹⁴

¹³ In studies of American public opinion about the Vietnam War and social welfare policies, Berinsky finds evidence to suggest that the balance of elite discourse about issues that are cognitive and socially "hard" (Carmines and Stimson, 1980) creates differential response rates in surveys. People who agree with the more-available elite opinion are more likely to respond precisely because they are "differentially advantaged by elite discourse enabling them to link their political predispositions to the political controversies [of the moment]" (Berinsky, 2004, pg. 107).

¹⁴ Thank you to Tariq Thachil for this point.

Figure 8: Comparing the approval rate to the “Don’t Know” rate in responses to the Gallup World Poll from 2006-2018. Approval rate is calculated as a proportion of *completed* responses.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	DK Count
Urban Resident	-0.198*** (0.043)
Full-time Employed	-0.175*** (0.052)
College Graduate	-1.860*** (0.071)
Observations	43,016
R ²	0.335
Adjusted R ²	0.334
Residual Std. Error	2.894 (df = 42970)
F Statistic	480.184*** (df = 45; 42970)
<i>Note:</i>	* p < 0.1 ** p < 0.05 *** p < 0.01 Heteroskedasticity-robust SEs (Huber-White) Ref levels: educ=elementary, employment = out of workforce

Table 3: Key demographic correlates of foreign policy question response. Data from pooled Gallup World Poll surveys in India, 2008-2018. Model includes fixed effects for state and year, standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust. Full model readout is in Appendix B.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	DK Count
> Rs. 20k/mo Income	-7.244** (3.414)
College Graduate	-5.830*** (1.760)
Observations	2,969
R ²	0.672
Adjusted R ²	0.668
Residual Std. Error	33.101 (df = 2936)
F Statistic	187.661*** (df = 32; 2936)
<i>Note:</i>	* p < 0.1 ** p < 0.05 *** p < 0.01 Heteroskedasticity-robust SEs (Huber-White) Ref levels: EDU=elementary, Income <3k/mo

Table 4: Key demographic correlates of foreign policy question response. Data from the 2006 Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey of India. Model includes fixed effects for state of respondent, standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust. Full model readout is in Appendix B.

Explaining Individual Attitudes: The Complicated Interplay of Region and Partisanship

Individual-level data from various surveys shows consistent patterns in the content of respondents' opinions of China. The largest and most consistent predictor of attitudes toward China is region: Across all four data sources and across multiple decades, regression models show that, all else equal, respondents in India's northern states generally have more negative views toward China than in the South.¹⁵ Region is virtually never a variable-of-interest in existing public opinion literature about foreign policy.¹⁶ Evidence from India also defies theoretical expectations about the role of partisanship in structuring foreign policy attitudes; partisanship is a less consistent predictor of foreign policy attitudes in India than in the United States, for instance (Saunders, 2015; Guisinger and Saunders, 2017). In surveys from 2016-2018—years when the BJP and Prime

¹⁵ **North:** Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand **East:** Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal **South:** Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, Telangana **West:** Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra

¹⁶ Though not about public opinion attitudes, Trubowitz 1992 examines regional politics in the US case.

Minister Narendra Modi held a single-party majority in the lower house of India's Parliament, and also years of a high-intensity border dispute at Doklam—support for the BJP is *not* a strong predictor of attitudes toward China.¹⁷

Regional differences—even after accounting for other influences—consistently structure Indian attitudes toward China. Figure 8 shows the region coefficients from models of “approval” of China fit to five different data sources. Coefficients compare China approval in East, South, and West India to the reference region “North.” They show a meaningful relationship between geography and China attitudes over a long span of time. The most consistent results differentiate South from North India. In every survey, respondents in South India have more positive views of China, even after controlling for demography and party affiliations. Other regions show significant differences at various times as well, but are not as consistent over time as the North-South divide. These differences are statistically significant, and substantial in magnitude. In the most recent Pew survey, the predicted probabilities of “approving” of China for respondents in each of India's four vary by nearly 20 percentage points (Figure 9). Even leaving out the South, which is an outlier in India along many dimensions, the North vs. East difference in approval is nearly 10 percentage points.

¹⁷ These are the only modern scientific polls in our dataset that measure domestic political affiliation aside from the 2014 Pew Global Attitudes survey, conducted before the 2014 general election brought the BJP to power.

Figure 9: Region coefficients from logit models of “Approval” of China. All models control for respondent demographics, education, and socioeconomic status. 21st Century models (in the right pane) also control for either party affiliation (Pew) or approval of India’s incumbent government (Gallup). Standard errors for the 21st Century models are clustered by primary sampling unit. Results show that region has a meaningful relationship with foreign policy attitudes, though the relationship seems to change over time. Full regression results in Appendix C.

Why might respondents in Southern India, and to a substantial extent also Eastern and Western India, have systematically more favorable views toward China than respondents in Northern states? One common explanation for differences between India’s South and the northern Hindi heartland—human development outcomes (Kohli, 2012)—is unlikely to be the culprit. The salience of region persists *after* accounting for factors like educational attainment, income, religion, and political affiliation, all of which vary widely across India’s states and regions. We posit that the explanation might be more prosaic. In contrast to countries like the United States (uniformly low threat of kinetic attack by international rivals)¹⁸ and Israel (entire country within rocket range of a rival), there is meaningful variation in how “present” the threat of the Sino-Indian

¹⁸ The French ambassador to Washington in the early 1900s said it best: the United States has one weak neighbor to the north, another to the south, and fish to the East and West.

rivalry is in different parts of India's territory. South India's major metropolises (Bengaluru and Chennai) are nearly 2000km from the China border; Delhi is within 400km. Another candidate explanation for regional differences is subnational identity/attachment (Singh, 2015). Southern Indians' stronger affinity to sub-national identity groups (vs. the national identity of "Indian") is long-standing state building puzzle in India. Higher prevalence of subnational attachments might explain why more South Indian respondents report favorable views of China in our data. Either could be interpreted as a signal of coherence and "reasonableness" in the structure of citizens' opinions. There may, of course, be other explanations for regional differences that we do not include here—our data do not allow us to compare, for instance, different respondents' distance to the Chinese border. We argue that given the persistent association between region and foreign policy attitudes in India, further research into this association is warranted.

Figure 10: Predicted probability of “approval” of China for respondents in different regions of India, for 2016-2018 Pew surveys. Point estimates show the predicted conditional probability of approval of China for a respondent in a given region and a given year, after controlling for all other variables in the model. Standard errors are clustered by primary sampling unit. The largest regional difference, North vs. South, is nearly 20 percentage points. A dashed grey line shows the timing of the Doklam dispute, in between the second and third surveys in the series.

While region is persistently associated with foreign policy attitudes in India, the relationship between opinions and partisanship is far more complicated. In the few surveys from Pew that ask about respondents’ support for major political parties, we find inconsistent associations between partisan identity and views of China. The 2016-2018 Pew Global Attitudes surveys show that favoring the ruling BJP is *not* significantly associated with a respondents’ propensity to express approval of China.¹⁹ Figure 11 shows the estimated association for “Favors BJP” in 2016-8 (together and separately) after including a variety of controls.

¹⁹ Appendix C shows similar results from 2014, shortly before the BJP assumed power. The only significant party effect in 2014 is the difference between the ruling INC and “other” parties, which mostly means regional parties.

Figure 11: Coefficient for BJP support in 2016-8 Pew surveys. The combined 2016-2018 model includes year fixed effects. No coefficient is significant at the 5% level. Full model details are in Appendix C. All error bars are standard errors clustered by primary sampling unit.

Though partisan affiliation does not seem to structure foreign policy attitudes in India the way it does in other contexts, there is an interesting interaction between partisan affiliation and region: BJP supporters differ substantially from supporters of other parties *in certain regions of India*. Figure 12 roughly replicates the estimates shown in Figure 10—the predicted probability of approval of China—but allows predicted probabilities to vary by both region and party affiliation. BJP supporters in the South drive most of the region effect identified in Figure 10; Southern BJP supporters differ from BJP supporters in other states, but also from supporters of other parties in the South. Interestingly, this significant interaction occurs in precisely the region of India where the BJP has historically been the weakest. Only Karnataka (one of five “southern” states, see Fn. 13) fielded a majority-BJP delegation in the Lok Sabha at the time the 2016-2018 polls were

conducted. Karnataka was also the only Southern state where the BJP won multiple seats in the 2014 general elections.²⁰

Figure 12: Predicted probability of “approving” of China, calculated from logit models of the Pew Global Attitudes Surveys, 2016-2018. Plots suggest that the “region” effect in the 2016-2018 results is driven largely by the attitudes of BJP voters. models in Appendix C.

How should we understand the unusual relationship between region, partisan identity, and foreign policy attitudes? First, our evidence clearly shows, as recently as 2018, that party preference is not, in India, a major axis for structuring attitudes about foreign rivals the way it (increasingly) is in the United States (Druckman et al., 2013; Agadjanian, 2021) and other polarized democracies (Nelson and Steinberg, 2018). The trends we find *even among supporters of the governing party* are consistent with the idea that national leaders like Narendra Modi are *chasing* souring public opinion toward China in the late 2010s, not *leading* it. Modi’s attempt to “reset” the relationship with China after Doklam (Panda, 2019; Madan, 2020) continued as a public

²⁰ Even in Karnataka, the BJP’s state-wide voteshare was only 3 percentage points higher than the voteshare for the major alternative party: the Indian National Congress

campaign well after even BJP supporters soured on China: by the Spring 2018 summit between Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping, only one in five respondents in North India (BJP supporter or not) held favorable views of China. Even among the most China-approving slice of respondents—Southern BJP supporters—just shy of 40% of respondents expressed “approval” by 2018.

Second, our analyses suggest that region is one of the largest and most consistent forces shaping the opinions of Indians who respond to survey questions about foreign policy. Just as the evidence about party preference is relatively *inconsistent* with the theory that elite cues drive the content of foreign policy attitudes, our regional difference evidence is *inconsistent* with the theory that the public opinion about foreign policy issues is scattershot or uninformed.

Third, models interacting region with party preference data suggest an interesting relationship between the two forces. If we see any evidence of elite cuing—respondents forming opinions based on the policies supported by elites in the party they support—it is in the comparatively bullish attitude of BJP supporters in India’s southern states. These respondents’ attitudes are more in line with Modi’s stated position on China circa 2017-8 than any other subsection of respondents. They represent an unusual group of supporters for the BJP. Because the BJP’s viability as an electoral party in South India is a relatively new development, supporters of the BJP (especially outside Karnataka) may either be more ideologically-motivated than other BJP supporters, or (especially in Karnataka) more likely to have become interested in the BJP via exposure to wide-ranging social service provision through the affiliated Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (Thachil, 2014).

Ultimately, analyzing the structure of individual opinions leads to conclusions that “rhyme” with other conclusions earlier in the paper. First, there is individual-level evidence (in addition to aggregate evidence) of consistent structure in the foreign policy attitudes of Indian citizens, across surveys from the 1970s to the 2010s. Region, in addition to more widely studied socioeconomic variables, is a consistent predictor of attitudes toward China. Survey responses do not appear consistent with an “uninformed” or “ambivalent” public. Second, foreign policy attitudes show some evidence of independence from the priorities of national leaders like Prime Minister Modi, even among supporters of Modi’s party. The main constituency for elite cues from the BJP do not seem to be taking the cues. If so, we would expect them to be more positive toward

China than supporters of other parties in 2017 and 2018.²¹ Finally, these trends reflect the views of, in some years, a minority of Indian survey respondents. Our analysis suggests that a key subset of the Indian public holds coherent opinions on a key foreign rival and that those opinions are not simply parroted from partisan elites. This opinionated group, however, is quite different from the median member of the democratic public in terms of education or wealth.

Implications for Research and Policy

This paper represents one of the most expansive studies of the Indian public's views of China. Our findings show trends that diverge in some important ways from existing literature on the correlates of foreign policy attitudes in democracies. With some exceptions, trends in Indian public opinion over time support the idea that the public coherently or reasonably responds to major trends in the Sino-Indian relationship. Relatedly, both trends over time and analyses of individual responses suggest that elite efforts at managing the China relationship do not straightforwardly translate into public attitudes. The contemporary decline in public views of China, for example, long predates the 2017 Doklam crisis and 2020 change in government messaging toward China. While media and political elites obviously are crucial conduits of information and attitudes, we should not assume that they are omniscient spin-masters.

Separately, we identify a new variable that *is* consistently associated with attitudes: geographic region. We identify some plausible explanations for this variation (and its interesting interaction with political affiliation), but mostly call for more research to investigate its causes. Our findings suggest, in total, that the ebb and flow of Indian attitudes about China are not particularly well characterized by any of the dominant theoretical frameworks built to explain foreign policy attitudes in “WEIRD” states.²² We advocate for more work in the future to probe these differences and answer causal questions about *why* India differs from Western democracies in the ways we identify.

While data suggests that some subset of India's democratic public holds structured and consistent foreign policy attitudes, our analyses also identify critical limitations to the “coherence” of Indian attitudes toward China. First, we show that public opinion is not infinitely sensitive to

²¹ In a 2014 survey shortly before the BJP's victory in parliamentary elections, BJP supporters rate border disputes as a bigger problem than supporters of other parties, but general attitudes about China, even in this survey, are not distinguishable.

²² Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (Henrich et al., 2010).

events in the Sino-Indian relationship. Through a series of border disputes in the 1980s and the 2010s, we find little evidence that the “shocks” of the disputes meaningfully affect attitudes. There is circumstantial evidence that the volume of media coverage may be important in determining how and whether border disputes enter the public consciousness. Second, and more troubling, we find high levels of non-response to foreign policy questions across multiple surveys and show that propensity to respond is strongly related to individual socioeconomic status and education.²³ To the extent that the Indian public voices its attitudes about China, the public’s voice reflects the attitudes of a comparatively wealthy, educated, and urban group. Responsiveness to public opinion, therefore, ultimately means responsiveness to a comparatively advantaged “foreign policy public,” not the entire country.

There is enormous space for future research. Of the many directions we do not explore, a few are particularly promising avenues for inquiry. First, all of the analyses here use a selection-on-observables framework to identify the correlates of various attitudes. Many of the correlations we identify could be fruitfully probed with survey experiments—though with the caution that the most readily-available survey experiment respondents (online) reflects the educated urban sample of the IIOPO surveys, not the nationally-representative Pew and Gallup samples (Pavlick et al., 2014; Boas et al., 2018). Second, many potentially important predictors of foreign policy attitudes like party affiliation and caste are measured sporadically in publicly available survey data. Much more work is necessary to understand how these socially important factors do or do not affect foreign policy attitudes. Finally, we do very little sub-group analysis, largely owing to the small survey samples available. Our findings suggest that analyses focusing more heavily on groups that are currently under-represented in aggregate public opinion measures—like rural residents, people with less formal education, and women (all groups that vote at high rates in India)—would be fruitful research endeavors.

How do these findings reflect on the function of democratic accountability in India’s foreign policy? First, the good news: a reasonably large section of the Indian public forms and expresses attitudes about China, and evidence suggests that their opinions sometimes diverge from the attitudes of prominent national leaders. Against a literature that debates whether *domestic*

²³ We cannot conduct the same tests as Berinsky (2004), but on the basis of his findings we assume that opinion *content* is not orthogonal to propensity to respond: the opinions of those not included in aggregate public opinion are likely different from the opinions of those who respond.

policy preferences in India are (Chibber and Verma 2018) or aren't (Chandra, 2004) individually ideologically coherent, the finding that many Indians form and express reasonable attitudes about China is cause for optimism. This finding, however, is strongly tempered by the high rates of non-response to foreign policy questions in general. Bottom-up accountability is hampered for issues where, in many years, the majority of the surveyed public does express an opinion. As in many Western democracies, expressed foreign policy attitudes reflect a non-representative subset of the population.

Though our results do not suggest a promising environment for seamless, bottom-up accountability, we see tentative evidence that contemporary Indian political leaders—including Narendra Modi—are not totally ignoring public opinion about China. Though Modi is often portrayed as uniquely charismatic (Sircar, 2020) and is thought to have turned foreign policy issues into electoral benefits in 2019 (Misra, 2019), our analysis of public opinion around the Doklam crisis suggests the “Modi Effect” may be working in reverse: the BJP government’s hardening stance toward China *follows* a steep decline in the warmth of public opinion toward China. As the Indian public’s attitudes toward China soured in 2017 and 2018, Modi was still very publicly advocating for a “reset” and productive cooperation. These trends add some nuance to the common portrayal of Modi as effectively transforming foreign policy issues into political flashpoints.

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Appendix A – Indian Institute of Public Opinion Surveys

The International Images surveys were run with American funding via the now-defunct U.S. Information Agency (Kunczik, 1990). Beginning in the Kennedy administration, the U.S. government funded public opinion studies mainly in order to compare the favorability of the United States to the Soviet Union—regular questions about China are a happy coincidence for present-day research (Haefele, 2001).

Appendix B – Correlates of Responsiveness Models

Gallup Model

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	DK Count
Urban	-0.198*** (0.043)
Household Income	-0.00000 (0.00000)
Male	-0.777*** (0.044)
Age	0.015*** (0.001)
Employment: FT Employed	-0.175*** (0.052)
Employment: Self Employed	-0.158** (0.063)
Employment: PT Employed	-0.088 (0.097)
Employment: Underemployed	-0.250** (0.097)
Employment: Unemployed	-0.499*** (0.089)
Region: East	0.136 (0.131)
Region: South	0.583*** (0.163)
Region: West	-0.806*** (0.127)
Edu: Secondary	-0.651*** (0.043)
Edu: Post-Secondary	-1.860***
Constant	8.355*** (0.185)
Fixed Effects	State, Year
Errors	HC2
Observations	43,016
R ²	0.335
Adjusted R ²	0.334
Residual Std. Error	2.894 (df = 42970)
F Statistic	480.184*** (df = 45; 42970)

Note:

* p < 0.1 ** p < 0.05 *** p < 0.01

Edu = Primary, Region=North, Employment=Out of workforce

CCGA Model

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	DK Count
Semi-Urban	0.994 (1.702)
Urban	1.201 (1.480)
Income > Rs. 20k/mo	-7.244** (3.414)
Income Rs. 10k-20k/mo	-4.499** (2.181)
Income Rs. 3k-6k/mo	-2.003 (1.911)
Income Rs. 6k-10k/mo	-1.353 (1.927)
Edu: Illiterate	127.263*** (3.582)
Edu: Informal	1.291 (2.434)
Edu: Post-Grad	-11.041*** (2.040)
Edu: Post-Secondary	-5.830*** (1.760)
Edu: Secondary	-5.742*** (1.699)
Male	-0.254 (1.554)
Year of Birth	0.093 (0.057)
Constant	-148.140 (112.092)
Fixed Effects	State
Errors	HC2
Adjusted R ²	0.668
Residual Std. Error	33.101 (df = 2936)
F Statistic	187.661*** (df = 32; 2936)

Note: *p < 0.1 **p < 0.05 ***p < 0.01

Ref levels: EDU=elementary,
Region=North, Employment=Out of
workforce

Pew 2014 Model (With Party Affiliation)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	DK Count
Region: East	-0.635*** (0.128)
Region: West	-0.251 (0.278)
Region: South	-1.030*** (0.204)
Party Preference: BJP	-0.262 (0.164)
Party Preference: Other	-0.090 (0.239)
Party Preference: None	-0.181 (0.466)
Additional Controls	Yes
PSU Clustered Errors	Yes
Observations	2,252
Log Likelihood	-912.625
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,909.249
<i>Note:</i>	*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05 ***p<0.01

Pew 2016-2018 Model (With Party Affiliation)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	DK Count
Favors BJP	-0.121 (0.099)
Region: East	0.484*** (0.146)
Region: West	0.398** (0.169)
Region: South	-0.551*** (0.160)
Additional Controls	Yes
PSU Clustered Errors	Yes
Observations	6,895
Log Likelihood	-3,577.725
Akaike Inf. Crit.	7,201.449
<i>Note:</i>	*p < 0.1 ** p < 0.05 ***p<0.01

Appendix C: Structure of Individual Attitudes
2014 Pew Global Attitudes – Party and Region

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Approval of China	
	(1)	(2)
Region: East	0.430** (0.197)	0.271 (0.493)
Region: West	0.229 (0.247)	0.229 (0.519)
Region: South	1.155*** (0.204)	1.038* (0.532)
Party Preference: BJP	-0.080 (0.181)	-0.197 (0.340)
Party Preference: Other	-0.388* (0.226)	-0.187 (0.437)
Party Preference: None	-0.566 (0.377)	-1.066 (1.087)
East X BJP		0.210 (0.476)
West X BJP		-0.140 (0.521)
South X BJP		0.327 (0.551)
East X Other		-0.273 (0.713)
West X Other		0.680 (0.630)
South X Other		-0.716 (0.550)
East X None		1.135 (1.425)
West X None		0.575 (1.270)
South X None		0.171 (1.310)
Additional Controls	Yes	Yes
PSU Clustered Errors	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,855	1,855
Log Likelihood	-1,196.586	-1,188.405
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,477.172	2,478.809
<i>Note:</i>	*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05 ***p < 0.01	

Pew Global Attitudes 2014 – Territorial Disputes Model

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Territorial Disputes are “Big Problem”?	
	(1)	(2)
Region: East	-0.002 (0.320)	-0.445 (0.598)
Region: West	0.014 (0.296)	-0.218 (0.701)
Region: South	-0.343 (0.346)	-0.380 (0.643)
Party Preference: BJP	0.397*** (0.149)	0.238 (0.404)
Party Preference: Other	0.269 (0.226)	-0.271 (0.575)
Party Preference: None	0.639 (0.557)	-0.254 (1.104)
East X BJP		0.542 (0.557)
West X BJP		0.197 (0.682)
South X BJP		-0.076 (0.574)
East X Other		1.244 (0.790)
West X Other		0.619 (1.012)
South X Other		0.458 (0.664)
East X None		-0.126 (1.489)
West X None		1.572 (1.715)
South X None		1.537 (1.675)
Additional Controls	Yes	Yes
PSU Clustered Errors	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,979	1,979
Log Likelihood	-728.805	-725.314
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,541.611	1,552.627

Note:

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05 ***p < 0.01

2016-2018 Pew Model

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Approval of China	
	(1)	(2)
Female	0.075 (0.062)	0.069 (0.062)
Age	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)
Edu: Informal	-0.104 (0.237)	-0.088 (0.233)
Edu: Primary	0.103 (0.156)	0.102 (0.154)
Edu: Secondary	-0.043 (0.159)	-0.036 (0.157)
Edu: Diploma	-0.329 (0.241)	-0.323 (0.240)
Edu: Post-Sec.	-0.212 (0.181)	-0.206 (0.179)
Edu: Post-Grad	-0.008 (0.209)	-0.005 (0.207)
Religion: Muslim	0.275* (0.162)	0.251 (0.161)
Religion: Catholic	0.588** (0.282)	0.680** (0.306)
Religion: Protestant	0.177 (0.479)	0.195 (0.502)
Religion: Sikh	0.211 (0.250)	0.202 (0.250)
Religion: Buddhist	0.718** (0.347)	0.655** (0.326)
Religion: Jain	-0.776 (0.783)	-0.766 (0.777)
Religion: None	-11.836*** (0.602)	-11.813*** (0.603)
Religion: Others	0.477 (0.574)	0.455 (0.594)
Region: East	0.250 (0.165)	0.571** (0.286)

Region: West	0.105 (0.178)	0.155 (0.313)
Region: South	0.823*** (0.178)	0.322 (0.272)
Favors BJP	0.168 (0.124)	0.062 (0.187)
East X BJP		-0.373 (0.285)
West X BJP		-0.060 (0.345)
South X BJP		0.602** (0.297)
Constant	-0.596** (0.244)	-0.496* (0.265)
Fixed Effects	Year	Year
PSU Clustered Errors	Yes	Yes
Observations	4,762	4,762
Log Likelihood	-3,010.224	-3,001.541
Akaike Inf. Crit.	6,066.448	6,055.082
<i>Note:</i>	* p < 0.1 ** p < 0.05 *** p < 0.01	

2016 Pew Model

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Approval of China	
	(1)	(2)
Region: East	0.452*	1.058**
	(0.250)	(0.508)
Region: West	0.043	0.246
	(0.277)	(0.486)
Region: South	0.594**	0.259
	(0.262)	(0.446)
Favors BJP	-0.095	-0.058
	(0.207)	(0.261)
East X BJP		-0.670
		(0.462)
West X BJP		-0.261
		(0.550)
South X BJP		0.395
		(0.481)
Additional Controls	Yes	Yes
PSU Clustered Errors	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,733	1,733
Log Likelihood	-1,175.339	-1,172.292
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,388.678	2,388.584
<i>Note:</i>	* p < 0.1 ** p < 0.05 *** p < 0.01	

2017 Pew Model

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Approval of China	
	(1)	(2)
Region: East	-0.265 (0.320)	0.007 (0.541)
Region: West	-0.112 (0.312)	0.271 (0.517)
Region: South	1.175*** (0.353)	0.800 (0.724)
Favors BJP	0.079 (0.242)	0.140 (0.387)
East X BJP		-0.308 (0.589)
West X BJP		-0.417 (0.510)
South X BJP		0.387 (0.651)
Additional Controls	Yes	Yes
PSU Clustered Errors	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,762	1,762
Log Likelihood	-1,092.882	-1,091.898
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,227.764	2,231.797
<i>Note:</i>	* p < 0.1 ** p < 0.05 *** p < 0.01	

2018 Pew Model

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Approval of China	
	(1)	(2)
Region: East	0.657*** (0.250)	0.613 (0.437)
Region: West	0.582** (0.294)	-0.510 (0.514)
Region: South	0.630** (0.268)	0.217 (0.392)
Favors BJP	0.357* (0.189)	-0.037 (0.338)
East X BJP		0.040 (0.443)
West X BJP		1.322** (0.598)
South X BJP		0.562 (0.454)
Additional Controls	Yes	Yes
PSU Clustered Errors	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,267	1,267
Log Likelihood	-693.340	-689.377
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,426.680	1,424.754
<i>Note:</i>	* p < 0.1 ** p < 0.05 *** p < 0.01	

Appendix References

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