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The Spillover of Violence:

Its Effects on Third-Party Observers

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

by

Zhiqian Wu

2025

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2025

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Spillover of Violence: Its Effects on Third-Party Observers

By

Zhiqian Wu

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Los Angeles, 2025

Professor Arthur A. Stein, Co-Chair

Professor Eric A. Min, Co-Chair

This dissertation develops a two-dimensional typology to explain how third-party observer states respond to foreign aggression. It argues that such responses are shaped by the interaction of two distinct drivers: empathetic identification with the victim and perceived existential threat from the perpetrator. Drawing on cases of China's repression in Hong Kong and Xinjiang (2019) and Russia's interventions in Georgia (2008), Crimea (2014), and Ukraine (2022), the analysis demonstrates that this framework consistently predicts variation in a third-party observer's reaction to foreign violence. States combining high empathy with high threat perception—such as Poland and the Baltic states during the 2022 invasion—mounted the strongest and most durable responses, providing sanctions, arms transfers, and diplomatic

leadership. By contrast, states motivated by only one factor engaged cautiously, while those lacking both largely abstained. The study further shows that empathetic framing, such as appeals to shared democratic identity, can expand coalitions of support, but significant commitments depend on the presence of tangible security stakes. Theoretically, the dissertation offers a parsimonious model that bridges literature on moral solidarity, threat perception, and public opinion. Empirically, it integrates event data, public opinion surveys, and rhetorical analysis to document how narratives reshape perceptions of interest and identity across diverse contexts. The findings carry important normative and policy implications. They suggest that third-party observers can significantly influence the trajectory of international crises when both empathy and threat converge, altering deterrence dynamics and reinforcing global norms. For potential aggressors, the results highlight that violence in an interconnected world is unlikely to remain localized: third-party responses may impose substantial costs that must be factored into strategic calculations.

This dissertation of Zhiqian Wu is approved.

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2025

DEDICATION

To my beloved wife and daughter,
to whom I owe my unconditional love.

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1. Introduction

Historically, the phenomenon of violence spillover—where foreign aggression resonates deeply within observing nations—has repeatedly reshaped political landscapes across diverse regions and historical contexts. During the First World War, for example, Germany's invasion of neutral Belgium in 1914 galvanized public opinion across distant democracies such as the United States and Great Britain. Although initially reluctant to engage in continental European conflicts, the widespread reports of atrocities committed against Belgian civilians significantly intensified public indignation and moral outrage, ultimately bolstering support for military intervention by Britain and contributing to eventual American involvement in the war. Similarly, during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), the atrocities committed by Nationalist forces, widely reported internationally, deeply impacted public opinion in distant democratic nations, particularly France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Citizens in these countries, while not directly threatened by Franco's forces, mobilized politically through volunteer brigades, humanitarian support, and extensive advocacy, driven by solidarity with Republican victims and opposition to fascist aggression. These responses demonstrate how foreign violence can spur significant transnational political activism rooted in moral and ideological identification.

More recently, other historical instances, such as South Africa's apartheid regime and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, also demonstrate how distant violence can mobilize third-party observers politically and morally, leading to substantial shifts in national policies and potentially electoral outcomes.

In contemporary international politics, violence is often perceived through the lens of direct conflict between opposing parties. However, violent actions perpetrated by one state against another can profoundly influence the political attitudes, electoral choices, and policy

directions of third-party (especially democratic) states, even when these observers are neither directly involved nor immediately targeted by aggression. This dissertation explores this understudied phenomenon, termed here as the "spillover of violence," and investigates how and why foreign violence significantly reshapes political outcomes in observing states that merely witness such violence.

A striking illustration of this phenomenon occurred between 2018 and 2020 in Taiwan. Initially, the Kuomintang (KMT), a political party historically perceived as favoring closer ties with China[1], achieved considerable victories in legislative and local elections in 2018 largely due to the incompetence of the ruling party, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)'s domestic records and the promise of a more stable and profitable cross-strait relationship with China. However, this political landscape dramatically shifted following China's violent suppression of pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong in 2019. Although Taiwanese citizens were not direct victims, witnessing China's actions ignited substantial empathy for Hong Kong protesters and intensified fears about potential Chinese aggression towards Taiwan itself. These dynamics fundamentally altered public sentiment, driving up overwhelming electoral support to the incumbent Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), a party advocating stronger independence from and resistance against China, despite having lackluster and unpopular domestic policy outcomes. This rapid transformation highlights the potency of foreign violence to indirectly but decisively shape domestic political decisions through empathy, solidarity with victims, and perceptions of existential threat.

[1] The KMT was the ruling party of the Republic of China prior to its loss against the Communist Party of China in the Chinese Civil War. It is also called the Chinese Nationalist Party. KMT fled mainland China to Taiwan at the end of the Chinese Civil War and held on to power in a military-junta style autocracy until the late 20th century. Its roots guaranteed its connection to mainland, and this connection persists through generations.

Beyond the Taiwan example, global responses to Russia's 2022 invasions in the 21st century offer another clear manifestation of this spillover effect. Many countries observing the conflict, particularly those with historical experiences of Russian aggression or ideological alignment with democratic values, mobilized significantly. Populations within these states displayed heightened empathetic solidarity with Ukrainian victims and intensified hostility toward Russia, influencing national policies such as increased defense spending, diplomatic solidarity, humanitarian assistance, and electoral shifts toward parties advocating stronger anti-Russian stances.

This dissertation proposes a comprehensive theoretical framework, "The Theory of Violence Spillover and Third-Party Response," to elucidate this phenomenon. Drawing upon psychological theories such as Social Identity Theory, Self-Categorization Theory, Integrated Threat Theory, Terror Management Theory and others, this framework explains how third-party observers experience emotional solidarity with victims and existential anxiety regarding perpetrators. It argues that the strength of political mobilization depends significantly on two primary conditions: empathetic solidarity with victim groups and perceived threats from perpetrating states.

To empirically substantiate this theory, the dissertation employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analyses (such as public opinion surveys, online search data, and electoral outcomes) with qualitative examinations of state and citizen-level responses to recent high-profile international conflicts. The analytical focus encompasses case studies involving China’s repression in Hong Kong and Russia’s aggression against Georgia and Ukraine, selected due to their high global visibility, clear victim-perpetrator dynamics, and profound implications for democratic states observing these crises.

By systematically examining the mechanisms through which observed foreign violence influences domestic political behavior and policy formation, this research fills a critical gap in international relations scholarship. It also provides policymakers with vital insights into how distant geopolitical events can resonate domestically, potentially reshaping democratic societies' policy trajectories and electoral landscapes. Understanding this spillover phenomenon is crucial in a globalized world where violent conflicts are more gruesomely visible to all, and increasingly shape international perceptions, diplomatic relationships, and domestic politics far beyond their immediate geographic scope.

2. Theoretical Framework

This dissertation advances a theoretical framework positing that foreign violence can meaningfully reshape the domestic political landscape of third-party states under specific conditions. The effect is most pronounced when observers simultaneously empathize with the victims and perceive threat or hostility from the perpetrator. In such cases, both political elites and ordinary citizens may mobilize—reshaping electoral outcomes and policy preferences—even though their state is not directly targeted.

At its core, the framework highlights identification as the key mechanism through which violence spills across borders. Identification operates along two dimensions: (1) empathetic solidarity with the victims, often grounded in shared ethnic, cultural, historical, or geopolitical bonds, and (2) apprehensive hostility toward the perpetrator, driven by fears of similar aggression in the future. Drawing on psychological scholarship, the framework explains why observers' ties to victims strengthen feelings of solidarity and mobilization, while perceptions of threat encourage defensive or assertive political stances.

Although existing international relations research sheds partial light on these dynamics, it does not fully capture them. Two prominent literature on two-level games and the interaction of public opinion with foreign policy—tend to focus on cases of direct domestic involvement in international crises. These approaches miss the scenarios in which distant observers, formally uninvolved, nonetheless react powerfully to foreign violence. By contrast, the framework advanced here emphasizes foreign violence as a critical external shock that triggers identity reevaluation, producing empathy toward victims and hostility toward perpetrators. Together, these processes generate the conditions for significant political mobilization and policy change within third-party democracies.

2.1 Identification: empathetic solidarity with the victim group

Understanding third-party responses to foreign violence necessitates a comprehensive multi-theoretical psychological framework. First, Social Identity Theory (SIT), Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) and intergroup empathy literature can help us understand how the cognitive process can lead individuals to certain outcome behaviors, in this case, witnessing a foreign victim group's suffering, motivating them to act and realign themselves closer to the victims.

2.1.1 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed primarily by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, offers a profound psychological explanation for how individuals and groups derive meaning, identity, and self-esteem from their group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). One of the key findings of their experiments is that even arbitrarily created groups devoid of any prior identification can create group loyalty within, and certain hostility towards the outgroup. The implication of that on the international stage is that the simple act of grouping certain regions/states/people together can create a sense of ingroup for them. For example, Former Soviet Bloc can provide a certain level of ingroup identification among them as this label gets repeatedly used, creating bonds between the Baltic states, Eastern European and Central Asian states, even though they can be drastically different. Similarly, grouping Hong Kong/Macau/Taiwan (港澳台) together, as areas with distinct administrations from Mainland China, can create a sense of solidarity between them. On the contrary, even though Shenzhen (under direct rule of Mainland China) is geographically, linguistically, and culturally much closer to Hong Kong and Macau (all three are historically part of the Canton region, with significant portions of Cantonese speakers and Hakka speakers, while Taiwan speaks mostly

Mandarin and Hokkien), Shenzhen is not part of the trio and would be considered an outsider to them. Central to SIT is the idea that individuals are driven to maintain positive distinctiveness for their ingroups, often by emphasizing favorable comparisons relative to relevant outgroups. It is up to the actors themselves then to choose an identifier when a trigger occurs. In the case of political violence, I argue that it is the political identity that gets to become the fault line that separates ingroup and outgroup. When a group associated with an individual's identity experiences injustice, violence, or threat from another entity, even if indirectly observed, it triggers significant cognitive and emotional responses, mobilizing action to defend the ingroup's integrity and positive distinctiveness.

In contexts involving third-party observations of political violence, SIT can illuminate how individuals respond psychologically through the process of social mobility, social creativity, and social competition. Each process represents a strategic response to intergroup threats, shaped by perceived permeability of group boundaries, stability of group status hierarchies, and legitimacy of intergroup relations.

Social mobility, according to SIT, refers to individual's attempts to dissociate from lower-status or threatened groups and join groups with higher-status or greater security when group boundaries are perceived as permeable. In the case of a third-party observer, there can be potentially two directions of mobility: to inch towards the perpetrator, or to inch towards the victims. First, in many cases, the boundaries are not so permeable. For example, most of the Dutch witnessing German atrocity in Belgium in World War I cannot "become" German as they are two impermeable groups. However, in some other cases, especially with diaspora, it is indeed a valid option. For example, when Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, many ethnic Russians in Ukraine indeed took political actions to solidify their Russian identity and participated in

protesting against Georgia (On the other hand, ethnic Ukrainians strongly protested Russia). Even without diaspora, there are potential reasons for some to use social mobility towards the perpetrator group when they can find some identification divider such as culture or religion. For example, prosecution of Jews in Nazi Germany did inspire some Italians, Romanians, and Hungarians to identify more with the Nazi agenda and pursue policies close to the perpetrators rather than the victims. However, this strategy is often less feasible in contexts where ethnic, cultural, or historical ties strongly bind observers to victims. For example, during Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the shared historical experiences of Eastern European nations under Soviet rule made social mobility difficult or undesirable. Rather than distancing themselves from Ukraine, citizens of Poland, the Baltic states, and Moldova closely identified with the Ukrainians, reinforcing ingroup solidarity instead of pursuing dissociation.

Social creativity emerges as a more adaptive response when group boundaries are impermeable, and intergroup status relations are stable and seemingly legitimate. Under such conditions, members of threatened or subordinate groups reinterpret or redefine group attributes, emphasizing alternative dimensions of comparison to maintain positive self-concept. Applied to third-party observations, social creativity might manifest in emphasizing moral superiority or resilience of victim groups facing oppression or violence. For instance, Taiwan's response to the 2019 Hong Kong protests involved extensive emphasis on democratic values, civil liberties, and moral courage as alternative bases of positive identification, allowing Taiwanese citizens to reinterpret their shared identity with Hong Kong protesters positively, despite the threat from China.

Lastly, social competition involves active confrontation with the perpetrator group to improve or protect group status when group boundaries are impermeable, status hierarchies

unstable, and intergroup differences illegitimate or unjust. In third-party contexts, social competition becomes highly salient when violence by perpetrators threatens fundamental ingroup identities, values, or survival. Historical examples from World War I and World War II vividly illustrate social competition among nations indirectly impacted by aggression. The United States, initially neutral during both wars, eventually mobilized significantly against aggressor states in World War II (Germany, Japan, and their allies), viewing the violent actions of these perpetrators as profound threats to democratic and liberal values shared with victimized nations. Similarly, recent responses by NATO countries to Russia's aggression in Ukraine in 2022 reflect clear patterns of social competition. These countries have adopted robust political, economic, and military measures against Russia, motivated not merely by strategic calculations but by perceived threats to collective democratic identity and security.

In addition to these strategies, SIT underscores the role of ingroup-outgroup differentiation in amplifying intergroup hostility and cooperation. Violence perpetrated against groups perceived as ingroup members by a third-party audience intensifies this differentiation, increasing emotional solidarity toward victims and hostility toward perpetrators. Conversely, when victims are perceived as outgroup members or irrelevant, observers' emotional engagement and political responses are markedly diminished. For instance, international reactions to human rights abuses in regions like Xinjiang have been significantly weaker in countries lacking ethnic, cultural, or historical connections to the Uyghurs. This diminished identification highlights the crucial role of perceived ingroup relevance in shaping third-party responses.

Furthermore, SIT highlights how external threats, such as political violence, can catalyze the mobilization of collective identity, generating stronger social cohesion and political activism within observing states. The aggressive actions of authoritarian regimes, such as Nazi Germany

in World War II, Russia in Ukraine, and China in Hong Kong, have historically fostered unprecedented levels of social unity and political mobilization among threatened or closely aligned third-party nations. Observing such violence often spurs domestic populations toward collective defense of shared identities and values, triggering political realignments and policy shifts aimed explicitly at countering perceived existential threats.

In conclusion, Social Identity Theory provides a robust explanatory framework for understanding the complex psychological dynamics of third-party responses to observed political violence. The strategies of social mobility, social creativity, and social competition outlined by SIT demonstrate the diverse ways in which third-party citizens navigate threats to group identity and status. By emphasizing identity salience, perceived legitimacy of threats, and ingroup-outgroup distinctions, SIT effectively explains why certain violent events elicit profound political responses in some observing populations but only muted reactions in others.

2.1.2 Self-Categorization Theory

While SIT effectively outlines the potential strategies for a group member during intergroup conflict, it is insufficient to explain where the real-world groups form. Self-Categorization Theory (SCT), developed by Turner and colleagues (Turner, 2010; Turner et al., 1987), expands upon Social Identity Theory by emphasizing the cognitive mechanisms by which individuals identify with groups, delineating how categorization shapes perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors towards ingroups and outgroups. Central to SCT is the principle that individuals tend to categorize themselves with others perceived as similar, enhancing emotional attachment, cognitive alignment, and behavioral solidarity with these groups.

In the context of third-party observations of political violence, SCT suggests that the extent to which individuals identify with victims is contingent on cognitive processes of

categorization, shaped by perceived group similarities in ethnicity, political ideology, historical experiences, or cultural practices. When third-party observers categorize victimized groups as members of their cognitive ingroup, it heightens emotional engagement, solidarity, and willingness to act in their defense. Conversely, victims categorized cognitively as part of an outgroup receive less empathy, attention, and political mobilization from observers.

An important mechanism in SCT is comparative fit and normative fit, guiding categorization processes. Comparative fit describes how clearly social groups are distinguished from each other in a given context. High comparative fit emerges when differences between groups are pronounced, salient, and relevant to observers' social identities. Normative fit refers to the meaningfulness of categorization based on cultural expectations, norms, or historical narratives. Both comparative and normative fits significantly influence how third-party observers categorize foreign victims and perpetrators, thereby shaping responses to political violence.

For instance, in Poland's relationship with Ukraine, both comparative and normative fits were particularly high. Comparative fit was enhanced due to clear, salient distinctions between democratic, freedom-oriented Ukrainian defenders and the authoritarian Russian invaders. Normative fit was amplified by shared cultural and historical experiences—such as past vassal like status under Russian and Soviet rules—making identification highly relevant and meaningful to the Polish. Consequently, this cognitive categorization of Ukrainians as "ingroup" by the Polish, and the Russians as the "outgroup" fostered substantial political mobilization and policy shifts in Poland following the 2022 Russian invasion.

In contrast, weaker third-party responses to human rights abuses in regions such as Rohingya reflect lower cognitive categorization with victims. While many Western democracies strongly condemned Myanmar's abuses on moral grounds, the victims (Rohingya) were

cognitively categorized as distant outgroup members due to minimal historical ties, cultural unfamiliarity, and relatively low comparative fit in direct identity relevance. Consequently, despite broad moral disapproval, third-party responses were relatively muted, with limited direct political action or mobilization, highlighting SCT's critical role in shaping varied international responses to distant violence.

Finally, SCT clarifies how internal group cohesion within observer nations can strengthen significantly as third-party populations collectively recategorize themselves and victims into a shared ingroup when facing a common threat. Heightened self-categorization generates internal social solidarity and unified political action, especially when confronting significant existential or symbolic threats. Observers' recategorization of themselves alongside victims as shared democratic or moral communities facing authoritarian threats amplified political unity and policy coherence, driven by SCT's underlying categorization mechanisms.

In conclusion, Self-Categorization Theory provides a rigorous cognitive-psychological framework for understanding how third-party observers respond politically to foreign violence. By explicating categorization processes of comparative fit, normative fit, and dynamic identity shifts, SCT robustly explains variations in third-party political engagement and mobilization. Understanding SCT's cognitive mechanisms highlights why certain instances of political violence profoundly influence third-party democratic observers, prompting substantial domestic political shifts, while others remain comparatively less impactful.

2.1.3 Intergroup Empathy

In addition to Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT), which explain why and how group identities form and shift in response to third-party aggression, Intergroup Empathy research clarifies how empathetic emotions can evolve. Specifically,

empathy acts as a psychological mechanism translating distant observations of violence into tangible political and social outcomes, then these tangible political and social changes will in turn deepen the empathetic bond, creating a loop.

Batson and Ahmad (2009) categorize empathy into distinct psychological states, each characterized by different cognitive and emotional orientations (see Table 1). Cognitive empathy involves consciously taking the perspective of others: either imagining oneself in another's situation ("imagine-self perspective") or cognitively understanding how another person might feel in their specific context ("imagine-other perspective"). Conversely, emotional or affective empathy involves feeling emotions similar to those of another individual ("emotion matching") or feeling genuine emotional concern for their suffering ("empathic concern").

Table 1 The Four Psychological States Called Empathy in the Intergroup Relations Literature

Psychological State	Self-focused	Other-focused
Cognitive/perceptual State	**Imagine-self perspective** Imagining how one would think and feel in another's situation or "shoes."	**Imagine-other perspective** Imagining how another person thinks or feels given his/her situations.
Affective/emotional State	**Emotion matching** Feeling ***as*** another person feels	**Empathic concern** Feeling ***for*** another person who is in need.

Complementing this, Stephan and Finlay (1999) differentiate between cognitive empathy and two forms of emotional empathy—parallel empathy (similar to emotion matching) and reactive empathy (similar to empathic concern). Cognitive empathy is fundamentally analytical, enabling long-term perspective-taking and fostering deeper understanding about outgroup members' cultural norms, beliefs, and experiences. In contrast, parallel empathy represents a more immediate, emotional resonance with the victim's experiences. Reactive empathy, however,

is distinctively potent as it entails emotional responses (e.g., indignation, moral outrage) specifically triggered by witnessing injustice and harm.

Stephan and Finlay suggest cognitive empathy as crucial for acquiring deeper knowledge and improving intergroup understanding, as it helps observers grasp the worldview and experiences of others. Historically, empathy research has predominantly examined direct intergroup conflicts, such as racial, ethnic, or religious tensions within societies. For example, previous studies emphasized empathy-building initiatives aimed at resolving conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians (Kelman, 1990), or cooperative educational programs in ethnically mixed classrooms in the United States (Aronson et al., 1978).

However, extending this rationale, I argue that empathy similarly influences third-party observers who witness violence directed by one outgroup towards another. Indeed, empathetic feelings—and the subsequent acquisition of knowledge—might be even more pronounced among third-party observers, as they experience fewer cognitive barriers like dissonance or ingroup bias. For instance, it may be cognitively challenging for White Americans to deeply empathize with African Americans when the perpetrator is another White American, due to ingroup cognitive dissonance. Conversely, an Asian American observing such violence would likely face fewer cognitive barriers, facilitating stronger empathetic responses. My primary dissertation analysis, which focuses on cross-border attitudes toward observed political violence (e.g., Taiwan observing Hong Kong; Poland observing Ukraine), aligns more closely with this latter scenario, indicating potentially heightened cognitive empathy effects.

Batson's (1997) foundational work further outlines specific intergroup outcomes derived from different empathetic states (Table 2):

Table 2 Intergroup Effects of empathy

Psychological State	Intergroup Effects
Imagine-self perspective	Reduced stereotyping and more positive evaluation of (a) the out-group member in whose situation one imagines oneself and (b) the out-group as a whole.
Imagine-other perspective	Increased situational attribution for plight of the specific out-group members; increased empathic concern for him/her; more positive attitudes toward the out-group as a whole; increased readiness to help the out-group.
Emotion matching	More negative evaluation of those causing others' plight; more positive feelings toward the out-group.
Empathic concern	Increased valuing of welfare of the specific out-group members for whom empathic concern felt; more positive attitudes toward the out-group as a whole; increased readiness to help the out-group.

These empathetic psychological states are interconnected and fluid. An observer's empathetic state can shift between categories, often starting from an instinctive emotion-matching state and evolving deeper, cognitive empathy and empathic concern.

This fluid empathy-to-action dynamic is exemplified historically. The global response to Nazi Germany's aggression in the initial stages of World War II illustrates how empathy helped to generate political mobilization. Initial global reactions to the invasion of Poland and subsequent atrocities were largely emotion-driven, characterized by strong emotional matching—feelings of shock and horror. Yet, as knowledge of Nazi atrocities deepened, cognitive empathy developed, prompting greater empathic concern for European victims and eventually solidifying into concrete political actions such as provision of humanitarian aid, and post-war commitment to human rights principles. I argue that the general opinions of Jews improved amongst most populations around the world can be attributed to empathetic concerns.

Thus, empathy's effects follow a clear three-stage pathway described by Batson et al. (1997). Initially, observers feel empathic concern toward individual victims of violence. Second, observers begin to value these individuals' welfare, driven by emotional resonance with their

suffering. Finally, concern for individual victims generalizes positive beliefs and attitudes toward the entire victimized group. This generalized empathy translates into broader political mobilization and advocacy, aimed at preventing or alleviating further suffering.

My dissertation seeks to extend the empathy literature by systematically analyzing empathy's political effects among third-party democratic observers who are not directly involved in conflicts. Previous studies, though insightful, predominantly focus on direct intergroup tensions (e.g., Israeli Palestinian, racial conflicts). By contrast, my research highlights empathy's role in situations where observers, while geographically or politically distinct, nonetheless feel compelled to act politically due to strong empathetic resonance. Understanding these dynamics is particularly crucial in an increasingly interconnected world, where foreign atrocities frequently shape political discourse, electoral outcomes, and policy formulation in observer democracies.

In summary, intergroup empathy significantly shapes political attitudes and actions in response to observed foreign violence. Empathy, particularly empathic concern and cognitive empathy—serves as a transformative emotional mechanism translating distant suffering into concrete political mobilization. Historical and contemporary examples demonstrate clearly that empathy can foster solidarity, intensify moral condemnation of perpetrators, and profoundly reshape political behaviors among third-party observers, thus broadening our understanding of empathy's role in international relations and democratic political processes.

2.2 Identification: fearful hostility towards the perpetrator group

Both ancient wisdom and network theory posit that the enemy of a friend is an enemy to maintain cognitive consistency. Its psychological roots can be used to assess how an observer would feel and subsequently act when witnessing an outgroup perpetrator targets a friendly outgroup. The former section of empathetic solidarity is intimately intertwined with this section

on fearful hostility. The two emotions reinforce and strengthen each other in order to avoid cognitive dissonance in maintaining a positive image of oneself and its friend, while worsening its stereotypes and hostility towards a shared adversary/enemy. In this section, I examine the implications of Integrated Threat Theory, Prospect Theory, Moral Foundation Theory, Vicarious Retribution, and Terror Management Theory to establish the link between observing foreign violence to attitude and policy changes in a third-party observer.

2.2.1 Integrated Threat Theory, Prospect Theory, and Moral Foundations Theory

While Social Identity Theory (SIT), Self-Categorization Theory (SCT), and Intergroup Empathy focus primarily on identification and emotional resonance with victim groups, Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) shifts attention toward the psychological impact of perceived threats from perpetrators. Developed notably by Stephan and Stephan (2000) and refined through empirical reviews such as Riek, Mania, and Gaertner (2006), ITT argues that intergroup attitudes and behaviors—especially hostility, anxiety, and defensive responses—are significantly shaped by the nature and intensity of perceived threats. In the context of third-party observations of violence, ITT offers essential insights into why distant aggression by foreign states can provoke significant political responses within unrelated observer states, driving electoral shifts, policy advocacy, and social mobilization.

ITT distinguishes between two principal types of threats: realistic threats and symbolic threats. Realistic threats are tangible concerns regarding physical security, economic stability, or political autonomy. Symbolic threats involve intangible issues related to cultural values, identity, ideology, or moral integrity. Both forms of threat profoundly influence third-party observers' perceptions of violent perpetrators, often fostering negative attitudes, increased hostility, and political mobilization against them.

2.2.1.1 Realistic Threats and Prospect Theory

Realistic threats are particularly influential in shaping third-party political behaviors because they activate existential fears of violence or loss of autonomy. When a state observes aggressive actions by foreign powers against third-party victims, observers may fear that the same violence might eventually target them.

I argue that in the case of a state's citizen feeling that they are realistically threatened, Prospect Theory provides an essential psychological perspective that explains how fear can be amplified and translated to actions. Originating from Kahneman and Tversky's groundbreaking work (1979), Prospect Theory emphasizes cognitive biases, particularly loss aversion—the tendency of individuals to prefer avoiding losses over acquiring equivalent gains. Applied to international political contexts, this theory elucidates how distant violence triggers concerns about potential losses, motivating political mobilization aimed at preventing perceived future threats or losses.

Prospect Theory argues that people do not always behave rationally, particularly under conditions of uncertainty and risk. Instead, their decisions are heavily influenced by framing effects and cognitive biases, primarily loss aversion. Loss aversion refers to individuals' greater sensitivity to potential losses compared to potential gains of equal magnitude. Even distant threats or losses perceived indirectly through observing foreign violence can significantly influence political preferences, policy demands, and voting behaviors.

When third-party observers witness foreign violence against victim groups, especially those with perceived similarities or shared vulnerabilities, they often cognitively anticipate future losses for themselves. These anticipated losses might involve diminished national security, compromised autonomy, loss of democratic rights, or threats to economic stability. Loss aversion

triggers powerful emotional and cognitive reactions, leading citizens to support political parties, policies, or actions explicitly designed to mitigate such anticipated losses.

Historically, realistic threat perception has repeatedly demonstrated its power in shaping third-party states' political responses. Even though both Britain and France were observers when Germany invaded Poland. Indeed, there are people who held that sentiment as a somewhat popular slogan of the anti-war faction in France translates to “Why die for Danzig?” (the region ceded by Germany to Poland after World War I, which Hitler wants to “reunify” it back into Germany) However, to most people, the threat of Nazi ambition over the rest of Europe was very real by that point. The expansionist behavior of Nazi Germany throughout the late 1930s profoundly altered political attitudes across Europe, mobilizing defensive alliances and aggressive military preparedness even among nations initially reluctant to engage in conflict. The invasion of Poland in 1939 crystallized the perceived realistic threat across Europe, prompting rapid, unified political and military mobilization among Britain, France, and other allied nations, ultimately reshaping the global political landscape,

2.2.1.2 Symbolic Threats and Moral Foundations Theory

Symbolic threats, equally critical in ITT, involve fears related to the erosion of values, ideologies, identities, and moral principles. These threats often generate powerful emotional reactions rooted in cultural, ideological, or moral solidarity. When observers witness violence perceived as attacking shared values—such as democracy, human rights, or cultural autonomy—they experience symbolic threats that intensify political mobilization against perpetrators. To explain how something symbolic can translate to solid actions and change, Moral Foundations Theory can offer crucial insight.

Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) introduces an essential moral and ethical dimension. Developed by Haidt and Joseph (2004) and further elaborated by Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009), MFT argues that individuals' moral judgments and behaviors are driven by innate psychological foundations. Specifically, these moral foundations profoundly shape third-party observers' reactions to distant violence, motivating significant political mobilization through moral outrage, advocacy, and policy change.

MFT posits that human moral reasoning arises from five fundamental psychological foundations, each deeply rooted in evolutionary and cultural history:

1. Care/Harm: Concern about suffering, compassion, and protection from harm.
2. Fairness/Reciprocity: Concern with justice, rights, fairness, and equitable treatment.
3. Loyalty/Ingroup: Prioritization of group cohesion, loyalty, and solidarity.
4. Authority/Respect: Respect for legitimate authority, social hierarchy, and traditions.
5. Purity/Sanctity: Concern for purity, disgust towards contamination, and preservation of cultural or moral integrity.

When democratic citizens observe violence perpetrated against distant groups, specific moral foundations are activated, generating moral outrage. Among democratic populations, the most frequently activated foundations in response to observed foreign violence tend to be Care/Harm and Fairness/Reciprocity. Observers perceive violent actions as unjustly causing harm or suffering, directly violating moral imperatives around compassion and justice. Such perceptions provoke powerful emotional responses, leading citizens to advocate politically for measures explicitly aimed at protecting victim groups and punishing perpetrators.

Observing foreign violence can strongly activate these moral foundations, triggering moral outrage—an intense emotional response rooted in perceived violations of moral standards.

Moral outrage subsequently mobilizes political behaviors aimed explicitly at correcting perceived injustices, protecting victims, and restoring moral order.

MFT emphasizes that moral outrage is a particularly powerful motivator of political mobilization. When third-party observers interpret violence as morally reprehensible, it significantly enhances political solidarity, advocacy, and public demands for policy interventions. The activation of moral foundations triggers collective indignation, fostering unified social and political responses aimed explicitly at addressing moral transgressions.

Historically, moral outrage has proven highly effective in motivating third-party political mobilizations. The widespread international condemnation of apartheid South Africa throughout the 1970s and 1980s provides a compelling illustration. Democratic societies worldwide perceived apartheid as fundamentally unjust, violating moral foundations of fairness and harm. Moral outrage mobilized international boycotts, divestment campaigns, sanctions, and sustained diplomatic advocacy, eventually contributing substantially to apartheid's demise.

Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) highlight that moral foundations activation can vary based on observers' cultural and ideological contexts. For example, while Care/Harm and Fairness/Reciprocity dominate responses within liberal democratic cultures, conservative populations often equally emphasize Loyalty, Authority, and Purity foundations. These differences explain why responses to observed foreign violence can vary even within democratic societies.

For example, responses in Singapore to China's heavy-handed approach in Hong Kong diverged markedly from those in Taiwan, despite both being situated within the broader Sinosphere. Even within Singapore, generational differences were pronounced: younger, more individualistically oriented citizens expressed greater initial sympathy for the Hong Kong

protesters, whereas older cohorts tended to view Beijing's actions more favorably, emphasizing the importance of order and stability. Singapore's own tradition of strict governance and heavy-handed rule likely shaped these contrasting perceptions.

MFT also clarifies why some violent events do not mobilize significant political responses. Moral outrage requires clear perception of moral violations. When violence is ambiguous, less visible, or culturally distant, moral foundations activation weakens. For example, despite widespread moral condemnation of China's treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, mobilization remained relatively muted compared to Ukraine or Hong Kong. Observers perceived violations as morally reprehensible, yet distant cultural unfamiliarity and ambiguity of available information weakened activation of immediate moral outrage. Thus, moral foundations explain clearly why political mobilizations vary across contexts.

In summary, Integrated Threat Theory (ITT), Prospect Theory, and Moral Foundations Theory significantly enhance understanding of third-party political mobilization triggered by observing foreign violence. By clearly distinguishing between realistic and symbolic threats, ITT clarifies how observers' psychological reactions shape their political behavior, attitudes toward perpetrator groups, and domestic political shifts. Historical and contemporary cases affirm ITT's robust explanatory power, highlighting how perceived threats mobilize observers politically, even when violence occurs geographically or politically distant from their immediate environments. Integrating ITT thus meaningfully deepens scholarly understanding of international political dynamics, illuminating the conditions under which distant foreign violence profoundly reshapes domestic political landscapes.

2.2.2 Terror Management Theory and Vicarious Retribution

Fear is on a spectrum, and at the extreme end, one can feel terror, fearing for one's very existence. Terror Management Theory introduces an essential psychological dimension specifically addressing existential threats. Developed by Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (1986), and extensively elaborated through empirical reviews such as Burke, Martens, and Faucher (2010), TMT posits that existential anxiety—triggered by awareness of mortality and threats to existence—significantly influences social behaviors, group identities, and political attitudes. Applied to international politics, TMT explains clearly how witnessing distant violence by aggressive states triggers existential anxiety among third-party observers, motivating robust political mobilization explicitly aimed at defending cultural values, national identity, and collective survival.

Vicarious Retribution theory (Lickel et al., 2006; Rothschild & Keefer, 2017) introduces an important dimension explicitly addressing observers' motivation to punish perpetrators of harm—even when the observers themselves are not directly victimized. Vicarious retribution occurs when a member of a group commits an act of aggression toward the members of an outgroup for an assault or provocation that had no personal consequences for him or her, but which did harm a fellow ingroup member. Furthermore, retribution is often directed at outgroup members who, themselves, were not the direct causal agents in the original attack against the person's ingroup. Thus, retribution is vicarious in that neither the agent of retaliation nor the target of retribution was directly involved in the original event that precipitated the intergroup conflict.

Together, these two theories can explain why really concerned third-party observers may take drastic actions against the perpetrators and their perceived group.

TMT argues that human awareness of mortality generates fundamental existential anxiety, which individuals manage primarily through two mechanisms: maintaining strong cultural worldviews and striving for self-esteem by conforming to socially valued standards. Cultural worldviews provide meaning, structure, and symbolic immortality, reducing existential fear by embedding individuals within meaningful moral communities. Conversely, threats or violence perceived as endangering these worldviews or collective identities provoke intensified existential anxiety, prompting vigorous political mobilization aimed explicitly at defending cultural worldviews, national identities, and societal values.

For third-party observers of foreign violence, witnessing distant aggression—particularly by powerful authoritarian states against culturally or ideologically aligned victimized groups—significantly heightens existential anxiety. Observers interpret these events as indicative of broader existential threats to democratic institutions, cultural values, collective autonomy, or national survival. Existential anxiety thus mobilizes third-party populations politically, strengthening ingroup solidarity, promoting defensive policies, and reinforcing symbolic commitments to democratic ideals, national autonomy, and cultural preservation.

TMT consistently demonstrates that existential threats significantly enhance ingroup solidarity, national cohesion, and collective identification. When individuals experience existential anxiety, they strongly reaffirm group identities and cultural worldviews, collectively mobilizing to defend their societies symbolically and practically.

Burke, Martens, and Faucher's (2010) extensive meta-analysis identifies several psychological mechanisms underlying existential anxiety mobilization. First, threats to existential security prompt intensified attachment to cultural worldviews and national identities, reinforcing ingroup cohesion. Second, individuals experiencing existential anxiety significantly

increase hostility toward outgroups perceived as threatening or culturally dissimilar, mobilizing aggressively against them. Third, existential anxiety enhances symbolic commitment to cultural narratives, traditions, and moral values that provide symbolic immortality, further reinforcing political solidarity and mobilization.

Vicarious Retribution literature largely agrees with the TMT, Rothschild and Keefer (2017) identifying several critical psychological mechanisms underlying vicarious retribution. First, observers experiencing moral outrage seek symbolic or practical punishment against perpetrators to reaffirm moral standards and deter future violations. Second, punishment restores psychological equilibrium and moral integrity within observing groups, reducing feelings of moral guilt or complicity that arise when observers fail to act. Finally, observers believe punishment communicates moral condemnation to perpetrators and reinforces international norms against aggression, injustice, and brutality.

Applied to third-party observations of foreign violence, these mechanisms explain why distant aggression often prompt strong punitive responses within democratic societies. Even absent direct threats, democratic populations perceive violations as moral affronts necessitating decisive punitive actions—such as sanctions, diplomatic isolation, or military aid to victims—to reinforce collective moral norms and international justice standards.

2.3 Alternative Explanations: Direct Foreign Interactions

Alternative explanations must be addressed to assess the validity of the claim that foreign violence shapes third-party citizens' political stances. One possibility is that shifts in political environments, policies, and public opinion arise not from observing foreign violence but from direct aggression against the third-party state itself. Another is that such changes are primarily driven by media influence (Entman, 2004; Baum & Potter, 2008). Indeed, the press plays a

critical role—as illustrated by the sharp contrast between free media systems in Hong Kong's surrounding states and the state-controlled environment in mainland China. Yet, closer examination of the cases considered here suggests that these explanations are insufficient. The perpetrator states did not, in these instances, launch direct acts of violence against observers; rather, measures such as Russia's reduction of gas supplies to Europe were retaliatory responses, not unprovoked aggression. Similarly, if election meddling by perpetrator states were decisive, we would expect electoral outcomes to favor the perpetrators. Instead, in multiple third-party democracies, electoral shifts moved against the aggressors and in favor of the victim.

These dynamics also cannot be fully explained by the well-established "rally around the flag" effect. That literature emphasizes surges of support for incumbents in the wake of direct attacks or collective victimhood (Mueller, 1970; Baker & Oneal, 2001). By contrast, the cases here involve publics rallying not around their own leadership following direct aggression, but around foreign victims of repression or invasion. Taiwan's post-2019 surge of support for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), fueled in part by solidarity with Hong Kong, exemplifies this distinction. Thus, existing frameworks alone cannot account for these outcomes, reinforcing the need for a theory that explains how observing foreign violence generates empathy with victims and hostility toward perpetrators, thereby reshaping third-party politics.

2.4 Theory of Violence Spillover and Third-Party Response

Building upon the insights of Social Identity Theory, Self-Categorization Theory, Intergroup Empathy, Integrated Threat Theory, Prospect Theory, Moral Foundations Theory, Vicarious Retribution, and Terror Management Theory, this dissertation proposes a comprehensive theoretical framework—the Theory of Violence Spillover and Third-Party Response. The central argument posits that observing political violence against an external group

can significantly reshape political attitudes, identities, and policy orientations in democratic societies that are not directly victimized. This spillover effect occurs through two primary psychological mechanisms: empathetic identification with victims and existential threat perceptions concerning perpetrators.

2.4.1 Empathetic Identification and Solidarity with Victims

Empathetic identification, as articulated by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987), and Intergroup Empathy research (Batson et al., 1997; Stephan & Finlay, 1999), is foundational for explaining why observers feel emotional solidarity and moral alignment with victimized groups. Observers who perceive strong cultural, linguistic, historical, institutional, economic, or political similarities with victim groups are more likely to experience heightened empathy, leading to stronger emotional resonance, identification, and subsequent political mobilization.

Social Identity Theory emphasizes how individuals maintain and reinforce group identities, particularly in response to external threats. Witnessing brutality against similar groups solidifies group boundaries, increasing ingroup solidarity and strengthening political cohesion. Complementarily, Self-Categorization Theory emphasizes cognitive processes, suggesting that violence vividly highlights distinctions between groups (comparative fit) and resonates deeply due to shared cultural, historical, or political attributes (normative fit), significantly enhancing observers' empathetic identification and political engagement.

Intergroup Empathy literature further emphasizes the emotional dimension of this identification. Batson et al. (1997) and Stephan and Finlay (1999) argue empathetic concern—rooted in shared vulnerabilities and emotional resonance—motivates observers to act politically, even in the absence of direct personal threats. Thus, empathetic identification is a necessary

precondition for substantial political mobilization in response to third-party violence, as observers seek to protect morally valued victim groups and rectify perceived injustices.

2.4.2 Existential Threat Perception and Responses toward Perpetrators

Parallel to empathetic identification with victims, third-party observers' perceptions of existential threats from violent perpetrators significantly shape their political reactions. As established by Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Graham et al., 2009), Vicarious Retribution (Lickel et al., 2006), and Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al., 1986), threat perceptions are multifaceted, incorporating realistic, symbolic, moral, and existential components.

Integrated Threat Theory explains observers' hostility and defensive actions toward perpetrators through realistic threats (concerns about physical safety, sovereignty, autonomy) and symbolic threats (concerns about ideological values, cultural integrity). Observers perceiving significant realistic or symbolic threats from violent actors mobilize politically, advocating policies designed explicitly to mitigate or deter perceived threats.

Prospect Theory further clarifies how anticipated losses, driven by cognitive framing and loss aversion, mobilize political behaviors. Observers witnessing foreign aggression cognitively anticipate potential losses to their security, economic stability, or democratic freedoms. Driven by loss aversion, democratic populations proactively advocate for preventive defense strategies, robust foreign policies, and electoral support for political candidates explicitly committed to safeguarding national interests and avoiding perceived losses.

Moral Foundations Theory emphasizes the moral outrage observers feel upon witnessing third-party violence, particularly when violence violates deeply held moral principles such as

fairness, justice, or compassion. Moral outrage motivates political mobilization, encouraging societies to take punitive actions aimed explicitly at aggressors to restore justice, uphold international moral norms, and reinforce democratic and humanitarian values.

Vicarious Retribution explicitly addresses observers' punitive motivations, highlighting that moral outrage over observed violence triggers demands for punishment of perpetrators—even absent direct victimization. Political actions such as diplomatic sanctions, economic penalties, military support to victim groups, and symbolic condemnations are manifestations of vicarious retribution, designed explicitly to uphold moral standards and international justice.

Lastly, Terror Management Theory underscores how existential threats—threats to collective survival, cultural integrity, or democratic institutions—strongly mobilize democratic populations politically. Observers experiencing existential anxiety significantly enhance national cohesion, ingroup solidarity, and political activism to defend national identity, autonomy, and collective survival.

2.4.3 Synthesizing Empathy and Threat: An Integrative Model

The theory proposed herein synthesizes empathetic identification and existential threat perceptions into a unified explanatory framework. Observers' responses to third-party violence depend on these two critical dimensions, shaping the intensity and nature of political mobilization:

Table 3 Violence Spillover and Third-Party Observer Reactions

	Strong Empathy towards Victim Group	Weak Empathy towards Victim Group
High Threat from the Perpetrator	**Solidarity Hawk:** Strong attitude shifts, extensive political mobilization (e.g., military aid, sanctions, strong diplomatic actions, electoral shift, party realignment, etc.)	**Non-committal Hedger:** Limited or moderate political response (e.g., humanitarian aid, symbolic solidarity, minor diplomatic statements, symbolic criticism, etc.)
Low Threat from the Perpetrator	**Non-committal Hedger:** Limited or moderate political response (e.g., humanitarian aid, symbolic solidarity, minor diplomatic statements, symbolic criticism, etc.)	**Peripheral Onlooker:** Minimal or no significant political changes

Based on the 2x2 typology matrix, I argue that we should roughly see three distinct types of third-party states corresponding to the level of political reaction a foreign violent act can instigate. The Solidarity Hawks are the states that feel the strongest empathy towards the victim, and acute, existential fear towards the perpetrator. I expect them to have the most drastic reactions including electoral shifts, solid diplomatic actions including aid to victims and sanctions against perpetrators. While states that score high in one of the two dimensions but low on the other fall into the Non-committal Hedger group. I expect them to provide limited aid or offer largely symbolic gestures that stop short of antagonizing the perpetrator. Lastly, the states that neither feel empathy towards the victims nor fear towards the perpetrator will be called the Peripheral Onlookers, who is expected to have little to no reaction and commit no solid action regarding the violence.

2.4.4 Attribution of Violence: Clarity and Intensity of Actions

Beyond empathy and threat perceptions, the attribution of violence itself significantly influences observers' political responses. Clear, well-documented atrocities elicit stronger moral outrage, identification, and threat perceptions, thus generating stronger and unified political

responses. Examples such as Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022 or China's violent suppression of Hong Kong protests clearly illustrate how well-documented violence intensifies global reactions.

Conversely, ambiguous, uncertain, or mutual violence often generates weaker, mixed, or fragmented political reactions. Cases such as complex civil wars or unclear aggressor-victim distinctions typically result in moderate or limited mobilization. Clear and unambiguous evidence of unjust aggression thus significantly enhances political mobilization, reinforcing the importance of transparency, media coverage, and international documentation of violence in generating robust third-party responses. However, I limit this dissertation's focus to the mechanism and effect of violence on the third-party observers instead of analyzing the nature of such violence itself. It is an important subject, and one that warrants further study beyond this dissertation.

2.5 Empirical Implications and Hypotheses

The integrative Theory of Violence Spillover and Third-Party Response developed in this dissertation suggests clear empirical implications and testable hypotheses. Given the dual mechanisms—empathetic identification with victim groups and perceived existential threats posed by perpetrators—specific observable outcomes should systematically occur when third-party observers witness foreign violence. These hypotheses focus on observer states' interest levels, identification with victims, and hostility toward perpetrators, along with clear indicators to empirically validate these claims.

Hypothesis 1: Heightened Observer Interest in Foreign Violence Events

Observers' interest in foreign political violence should be most significantly heightened in states characterized by strong empathetic identification with victim groups and substantial

existential threat perceptions from perpetrators. Empathetic identification generates emotional resonance and moral concern, motivating observers to pay close attention to events. Simultaneously, perceived threats from perpetrators intensify anxiety and vigilance, further elevating public awareness and interest.

Empirical Implications:

a. Increased Relative Search Volume:

- Observers in states with strong empathetic ties and high perceived threats will exhibit increased online engagement, reflected through heightened relative search volume on platforms like Google Trends.
- Search peaks should closely correspond with significant violent episodes, media coverage, and escalations in perpetrator aggression.
- Search volume should also change in regions where people are more empathetic towards the victim and fearful of the perpetrator. This means that geographically, culturally, and ethnically closer states would have more interest in the event than those more distant. It also means that within a given state, metropolitan areas (having more global connections or larger expat communities) would have more interest than rural areas.

b. Increased Importance of Victim State in Global Network

- With more attention paid to the victims of violence, the importance of the state of the victims should rise globally. Its network centrality measures should therefore see an increase (larger node). Aside from the centrality measures, its inter-state connection strength in the network should also increase (stronger edges)

Hypothesis 2: Increased Observer Identification and Solidarity with Victim Groups

As third-party observers witness violence inflicted upon external victim groups, observers' identification and solidarity with these groups will significantly strengthen. This enhanced identification arises from empathetic resonance, cognitive framing processes, and moral evaluations stimulated by visible victimization and perceived injustice.

Empirical Implications:

a. Increased Bilateral Interactions:

- Observable increases in political, diplomatic, economic, and social interactions between the observer state and the victimized group, measured through event-based databases (e.g., ICEWS, POLECAT), government press releases, and bilateral cooperation agreements.
- Enhanced frequency of mutual visits, statements of solidarity, joint policy initiatives, and expanded diplomatic presence serve as clear indicators.

b. Shift Toward Positive Language and Solidarity Statements:

- Observer states' political rhetoric and public statements will become increasingly positive toward victimized groups, emphasizing shared democratic values, moral alignment, and mutual solidarity.
- Systematic content analysis of speeches, press releases, social media posts, and diplomatic communiqués will reflect intensified empathetic and moral framing of victimized groups.

c. Policy Changes in Support of Victimized Groups:

- Observable policy shifts, such as enhanced humanitarian aid, relaxed immigration policies, increased refugee acceptance, diplomatic advocacy, or military assistance explicitly designed to support victim groups.

- These policy shifts will be clearly documented through legislative actions, executive orders, public budgeting records, and policy analyses demonstrating tangible alignment with the interests and welfare of victimized populations.

Hypothesis 3: Increased Observer Hostility and Defensiveness Toward Perpetrators

Witnessing third-party violence committed by perpetrator states will systematically enhance observers' perceptions of hostility, defensiveness, and punitive motivations toward the perpetrators. Driven by realistic threats, symbolic threats, moral outrage, and existential anxiety, observers will increasingly advocate for defensive or punitive actions against aggressor states.

Empirical Implications:

a. Electoral Shifts Toward Anti-Perpetrator Parties:

- Observable electoral shifts characterized by increased voter support for political parties and candidates explicitly advocating robust defensive measures, assertive foreign policies, and strong punitive actions against perpetrators.
- Elections following observed violent episodes will demonstrate significantly altered electoral outcomes reflecting increased threat perception, hostility, and moral outrage toward perpetrator states.

b. Worsening Public Attitudes and Perceptions of Perpetrators:

- Public opinion surveys and polling data will reflect increasingly negative evaluations of perpetrator states, characterized by heightened threat perceptions, decreased trust, increased fear, and intensified moral condemnation.
- Longitudinal survey data analysis will document measurable declines in favorable attitudes toward perpetrator states following violent events.

c. Increased Use of Hostile Rhetoric and Language:

- Systematic analysis of political discourse, speeches, official statements, and media coverage will document increased hostility, negative characterizations, moral condemnation, and defensive framing regarding perpetrator states.
- Observers' rhetoric will shift noticeably toward language emphasizing security threats, authoritarian aggression, moral violations, and existential danger posed by perpetrators, reflecting deepening hostility and anxiety.

Table 4 Summary of Empirical Implications and Testable Indicators

Hypothesis	Key Indicators	Data Sources
Heightened Interest (H1)	Increased search volume	Google Trends
	Regional variation within states	Subnational trends analysis
	Network strength	Node size increase, more and stronger edges
	Increased bilateral interactions	High level meetings and visits, agreements
Identification with Victims (H2)	Positive solidarity statements	official and media sources
	Policy changes supporting victims	Legislative records, executive orders, international agreements
Hostility toward Perpetrators (H3)	Electoral shifts to anti-perpetrator parties	Electoral results, party platforms
	Worsening attitudes in public opinion	Public opinion polls, survey data
	Increased hostile actions	Legislative records, executive orders, sanction regimes

In sum, this comprehensive set of hypotheses provides clear, empirically testable predictions derived explicitly from the integrative Theory of Violence Spillover and Third-Party Response. Notice that there is a certain level of feedback loop. As empathetic ties and existential threat primes certain states to feel more interested and react stronger to foreign violence. These reactions then further epitomize the empathetic ties and exacerbate fearful hostility. And this cycle can continuously move states from other quadrants towards the Highly Empathetic x

Highly Fearful pole, and when the next round of violence comes, elicit even stronger responses from the observer.

3. Observing Chinese Repression – Third-Party Responses to the Violence in Hong Kong and Xinjiang

3.1 Background and Timeline of Hong Kong Events

This Chapter applies the "Theory of Violence Spillover and Third-Party Response" to the context of China's political repression, with a primary focus on its violent crackdown on the 2019-2020 pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and its ongoing human rights abuse against the Uyghur population in Xinjiang. As previously argued, the theory posits that foreign violence – even when not directly targeting a given state – can significantly alter domestic political landscapes in third-party observer states, primarily through two psychological pathways: empathetic identification with victims and perceived existential threat from perpetrators.

Building upon this framework, the chapter examines how foreign societies responded to China's repressive actions, and why certain nations and populations – particularly Taiwan – reacted more sharply than others. While Hong Kong and Xinjiang represent vastly different types of cases in terms of cultural proximity, media visibility, and clarity of victim-perpetrator dynamics, both provide compelling opportunities to test the theory's central mechanism.

The backdrop of China's increasing authoritarian assertiveness under Xi Jinping and the visibility of both the Hong Kong and Xinjiang crises offers a rich empirical setting to analyze variation in third-party reactions. Hong Kong's shared cultural and historical ties with many outside societies – especially Taiwan – sharpened the sense of empathetic identification and symbolic threat, while the relative geographical and cultural distance from the Uyghur population in Xinjiang complicated identification and muted responses. This divergence allows us to explore how perceived group proximity, threat salience, and media framing condition the strength and direction of third-party political reactions.

By tracing the political, rhetorical, and electoral responses, this chapter aims to illuminate how China's domestic repression has generated far-reaching international consequences – not by provoking other governments directly, but by reshaping citizen attitudes, party support, and foreign policy stances in observer states.

3.1.1 The Evolution of Hong Kong's Pro-Democracy Movement

Hong Kong's modern political identity is rooted in its history as a 19th-century British colony, established amid imperial conflict and shaped by unequal treaties. The First Opium War (1839–1842) culminated in the Treaty of Nanking, under which Hong Kong Island was ceded by China to Britain on 29 August 1842. In the wake of the Second Opium War, the Convention of Peking (1860) transferred the Kowloon Peninsula and Stonecutters Island to British rule. Further territorial expansion occurred in 1898, when the New Territories were leased for 99 years.

Under colonial administration, Hong Kong developed into a thriving commercial and financial hub—leveraging its deep-water port and rule-of-law environment—yet its political system remained fundamentally non-democratic, with executive power vested in a Governor appointed by the British Crown. As historian Steve Tsang has observed, colonial Hong Kong offered "administrative efficiency but not democratic practice."

Negotiations over Hong Kong's future intensified as the 99-year lease approached expiration. The resulting 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration formalized arrangements for the handover in 1997, guaranteeing that Hong Kong would retain "a high degree of autonomy" and preserve its capitalist system, legal protections, and civil liberties under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework for 50 years. The Declaration, registered at the United Nations, specified that Beijing would handle only defense and foreign affairs, while Hong Kong's existing institutions remained intact.

On 1 July 1997, sovereignty was officially transferred, ending 156 years of colonial rule. After the handover, Hong Kong was established as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) under the Basic Law—essentially its mini-constitution—embodying and preserving the autonomy guaranteed in the Joint Declaration.

Since Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, its political development has been governed by the Basic Law, a mini-constitution ensuring a high degree of autonomy and the promise of eventual universal suffrage under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework. This arrangement was intended to last 50 years, with civil liberties and political rights preserved in theory (Wang, 2021).

Initial Assertion of Autonomy: The 2003 Protests

In 2003, Hong Kong experienced a watershed moment when over 500,000 people mobilized to oppose the proposed passage of Basic Law Article 23—the government's initiative to address treason, subversion, secession, and subversion against the Chinese state. Civil society warned that the legislation threatened fundamental freedoms. The mass turnout forced the government to withdraw the bill and marked a significant expression of local political agency. (North American Executive, 2024)

The 2014 Umbrella Movement

Tensions escalated in 2014 after Beijing unilaterally dictated a candidate nominating structure for the 2017 Chief Executive election, stipulating that only candidates approved by a pro-Beijing committee be permitted. This effectively undermined the Basic Law's commitment to genuine universal suffrage (Huang & Lahiri 2022). The Umbrella Movement emerged a 79-day occupation of central districts by thousands of protesters, primarily students, who

demanded full democratic elections. As one analysis summarizes: the movement sought "the universal suffrage that Hong Kong was promised in the Basic Law" (Gunia, 2019).

Erosion of "One Country, Two Systems"

Over time, the Beijing government has taken increasingly assertive steps to dilute the autonomy envisaged in the Basic Law. Commentators point out that the repeated suspension of democratic reforms, restrictions on political candidacy, and structural shifts toward "patriots administering Hong Kong" have exposed the fragility of the original framework (Grossman, 2019). By 2020, Beijing bypassed Hong Kong's legislature entirely, imposing a sweeping National Security Law that criminalized acts loosely defined as secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces (Maizland & Fong, 2025).

Rising Anxieties and Cultural Backlash

Each wave of protest has fanned eroding confidence in the "One Country, Two Systems" model. Citizens increasingly see Beijing's interventions not as breaches of a temporary understanding but as existential threats to Hong Kong's identity and freedoms. As one exiled activist Samuel Chu observed, "It is the end of an era, it is the end of 'one country, two systems'" (Shen & Pomfret, 2022). These sentiments intensified during the 2019 Extradition Bill protests—against legislation that could send Hong Kongers to mainland China for trial—where participants feared their legal and political protections were being dismantled.

3.1.2 The 2019–2020 Protests and Key Moments of Violence

The 2019–2020 anti-extradition protests in Hong Kong marked a historic rupture in the city's political life. Initially ignited by a proposed bill that would allow extradition to mainland China, the movement rapidly evolved into a broader demand for democratic accountability and police reform. Unlike previous protest waves, this episode was defined by recurrent violent

confrontations and a sustained militarized response by the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF). The cycle of escalation—between protester radicalization and state repression—intensified over the months, culminating in some of the most confrontational episodes in the city's post-handover history.

The first major escalation occurred on June 12, when tens of thousands surrounded the Legislative Council (LegCo) complex to halt the second reading of the extradition bill. Protesters engaged in sit-ins, road blockades, and chants of solidarity. In response, the HKPF fired tear gas, rubber bullets, beanbag rounds, and pepper spray indiscriminately into the crowd.

Released on June 20, 2019, a week after the day, Amnesty International stated, "(We have) collected footages and verified 20 of them concerning fourteen incidents of excessive use of force by the Hong Kong Police on the ground during the mass protest on 12 June 2019. This non-exhaustive collection of videos draws upon extensive media coverage and social media posts by local and international press organizations, civil society groups and people in Hong Kong. Based on our careful examination of these incidents, we find that the use of force by police in the largely peaceful protest was unnecessary and excessive. The use of force during the protest violated international human rights law and standards." (Amnesty International, 6/20/2019) This day, later referred to as "612," marked a turning point: public anger turned from the bill itself toward the police and government.

On July 1, 2019—the 22nd anniversary of the handover—protesters stormed the Legislative Council (LegCo) chamber following a large-scale peaceful march. Demonstrators shattered glass doors, spray-painted anti-government slogans on the walls, and replaced the official Hong Kong flag with a black protest banner. Although police allowed the occupation to proceed for several hours before intervening with tear gas and arrests, the moment became a

potent symbol of resistance, signaling a generational rupture in perceptions of state legitimacy. Some activists argued that the police had deliberately left the LegCo chamber undefended to lure radical protesters into desecrating a seat of government power. Others pointed to the emotional aftermath of the June 12 police crackdown, as well as the suicides of three young protest sympathizers in the intervening weeks, as having fostered a sense of desperation, rage, and martyrdom among youth activists—factors that likely contributed to the decision to breach LegCo.

While thousands gathered outside and participated in the break-in and subsequent vandalism, most protesters that day remained peaceful. Organizers estimated that over 550,000 people joined July 1 march. For most, the day was a nonviolent demonstration of civic discontent. Nevertheless, media attention understandably focused on the dramatic scenes inside the legislature, which eclipsed the broader peaceful mobilization (Ruwitch & Pang, 2019; Su, 2019).

In August, the protest movement sought to internationalize its message through nonviolent means. On August 12–14, protesters occupied Hong Kong International Airport, forcing the cancellation of hundreds of flights. However, the peaceful nature of the sit-in gave way to confrontation when demonstrators detained two individuals suspected of being undercover agents. Riot police entered the terminal, using batons and pepper spray on both protesters and journalists. The airport clashes generated global media coverage and tarnished the movement's previously nonviolent image (Washinton Post, 8/13/2019).

In late September 2019, solidarity demonstrations in Taiwan and around the world drew significant attention. On 29 September, a major solidarity rally took place simultaneously in Hong Kong and Taiwan, where organizers estimated over 100,000 participants in Taipei alone,

making it the largest global solidarity event to date for Hong Kong protesters. Concurrent marches in Australia and Japan also drew thousands, signaling broad regional support for Hong Kong's democratic movement (Hioe, 2019). In early October, the situation in Hong Kong escalated dramatically. On 1 October, police fired live ammunition at close range—reportedly striking a teenage protester in the chest—marking a previously unseen use of lethal force against demonstrators on the streets. This armament shift intensified both local and international alarm (The Guardian, 10/1/2019). Just days later, on 4 October, the Hong Kong government invoked sweeping emergency powers—using the rarely employed Emergency Regulations Ordinance—to implement a controversial mask ban aimed at curbing protest anonymity. The move sparked widespread outrage: tens of thousands rallied in defiance, refusing to comply, while both Amnesty International and the United Nations demanded independent investigations into the decision's legality and its implications for civil liberties (Amnesty International, 10/4/2019)

The movement reached another peak intensity in November 2019, when two universities became sites of sustained confrontation. At the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), students and residents attempted to block a nearby highway. Police responded by firing hundreds of rounds of tear gas and rubber bullets across campus bridges and into residential areas. According to Reuters, more than one hundred students and bystanders were injured, and the siege lasted several days. Just days later, the confrontation shifted to Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), which was entirely surrounded by riot police. Protesters built barricades and armed themselves with petrol bombs, slingshots, and even bows and arrows. Police responded with 1,400+ rounds of tear gas, dyed water cannon blasts, sponge grenades, and live ammunition warning shots. Nearly 1,300 individuals were arrested, including medics, journalists, and legal

observers (The Guardian, 11/29/2019). Human rights observers called the siege a humanitarian crisis and the most violent crackdown in Hong Kong's post-handover period.

Here is a summary of the various flashpoint events.

Table 5 2019-2020 Hong Kong Protest Timeline Summary Table

Date	Flashpoint Event	Protester Tactics	Government Tactics
6/12/2019	"612" Admiralty Clash	Sit-ins, roadblocks, barricades	Tear gas, rubber & beanbag rounds, pepper spray
7/1/2019	Storming of LegCo	Sit-ins, vandalism	Tear gas, arrests
8/12-14/2019	Airport Sit-in	Sit-in, Occupation, detainment of suspected government spies	Batons, pepper spray
9/26-10/4/2019	Pro-Hong Kong protests abroad, use of live ammunition, mask ban	Protests, sit ins	Legislation
11/11-15/2019	CUHK Siege	Barricades, sit-ins	Tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets
11/17-29/2019	PolyU Siege	Petrol bombs, arrows, barricades	Water cannon, tear gas, sponge grenades, mass arrests

These flashpoints illustrate a clear escalation: from large-scale sit-ins and initial militarized policing to symbolic institutional takeovers and, ultimately, full-scale urban and campus warfare. The escalation of violence, particularly within educational institutions, reshaped global narratives, deepened polarizations, and attracted international condemnation. These dynamics significantly influenced how external observers interpreted the protests through lenses of empathy, threat, and legitimacy, all salient to the theoretical arc charted in the preceding chapters.

3.2 Conditions for Strong Third-Party Reactions

The violent escalations detailed in the previous section did not occur in isolation. Rather, they reverberated widely across borders, drawing intense international scrutiny and eliciting a spectrum of political, emotional, and policy responses from democratic states. While the global

media extensively covered scenes from Hong Kong—tear gas blanketing university campuses, black-clad youth hurling Molotov cocktails, and riot police storming subway stations—these images landed differently depending on the observer. Some populations reacted with moral solidarity and political urgency, while others responded with relative indifference or even support for governmental crackdown on civilian violence. What accounts for this variation?

According to the theoretical framework laid out in Chapter 2, third-party reactions are primarily conditioned by two psychological mechanisms: empathetic identification with the victim group, and perceived threat from the perpetrating state. When both conditions are met—when a society sees itself in the victims and fears becoming the next target—citizens are more likely to engage politically, shifting electoral behavior, mobilizing civil society, and pressuring policymakers. The Hong Kong protests offer an empirical window into how these conditions manifest across democratic observers. This section begins by examining the clearest case of strong empathetic identification: Taiwan's unique and deeply felt connection to Hong Kong.

3.2.1 Empathetic Identification: Taiwan's Unique Relationship with Hong Kong

Taiwan's response to the Hong Kong protests were shaped by a deep sense of empathetic identification, rooted in shared cultural, linguistic, and democratic values, as well as a common anxiety about a deteriorating system of autonomy under China's increasing influence.

Hong Kong and Taiwan share a Sinosphere, cosmopolitan identity distinct from mainland China, shaped by similar colonial and postcolonial trajectories. Scholars have documented how both societies developed political identities anchored in democratic values and local consciousness—patterns that intensified during Taiwan's democratization and Hong Kong's post-1997 social evolution. This cultural proximity made developments in Hong Kong resonate

more profoundly among young Taiwanese, creating a sense of kinship and concern (Keading, 2010).

The warning cry "Today's Hong Kong, Tomorrow's Taiwan" became a rallying slogan in Taiwanese political discourse during the 2014 Umbrella Movement and regained currency in 2019–2020. It symbolized belief that the erosion of Hong Kong's freedoms signaled a potential democratic fate for Taiwan. As one expert in a Taiwan–Hong Kong comparative study noted, the Hong Kong protests effectively served as a warning sign for Taiwan's future under "One Country, Two Systems" (Lai, 2020). Thus, Taiwan befits the moniker of a Solidarity Hawk based on the typology argued in previous chapter.

Other democracies—such as Japan, the US, and the UK—invariably have connections and empathy towards Hong Kong. However, they lacked Taiwan's emotional and identity-based linkage to Hong Kong's struggle. Taiwan's geographic proximity and historical resonance endowed its citizens with an acute sense of vicarious threat and civic kinship, a depth of response unmatched by its democratic peers. On the other hand, other Sinosphere entities such as Macau and Singapore, though sharing the same ethnic and even linguistic ties, but the lack of pro-democratic traditions hinders empathetic connections.

3.2.2 Threat Perception: Fear of China Among Observer States

The perception of China as a threat varies substantially across the democratic states in 2019. This assessment examines how realistic, symbolic, or minimal concerns may shape their responses to Hong Kong's crisis.

3.2.2.1 Realistic Threat: Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam

Among democratic observers of the Hong Kong protests in 2019, several states perceived China as a realistic and immediate threat, though the degree and nature of that threat varied.

Notably, Taiwan stands apart as the only democracy facing what can be credibly described as an existential threat.

Taiwan regarded China as its primary and enduring security threat in 2019. Surveys conducted by Pew Research Center and Taiwan's National Chengchi University (NCCU) alike found that approximately 70% of Taiwanese viewed military aggression from China as a grave concern. Taiwan's geopolitical precarity stems from both its de facto independence and its lack of de jure international recognition. The island's official name—the Republic of China—and the People's Republic of China's longstanding claim that Taiwan is a "renegade province" under its sovereignty place it in a uniquely vulnerable position. Unlike territorial disputes in other regions, Beijing asserts a comprehensive claim to Taiwan's political existence.

This was underscored in President Xi Jinping's New Year's address in January 2019, in which he reaffirmed that "China must and will be reunified" and explicitly declared that the use of force remains on the table if necessary to achieve that goal (Xinhua, Jan 2019). From the Taiwanese perspective, the threat is existential: the likely outcome of a war with the mainland would be the end of Taiwan as a sovereign political entity.

Japan viewed China as a significant, though not existential, military threat. According to the 2019 Genron NPO public opinion survey, 58% of Japanese respondents expressed concern about Chinese military expansion. Interestingly, an even higher proportion—approximately 85%—identified North Korea as a more immediate military threat. Japanese anxieties toward China were largely driven by historical grievances, revisionist nationalism, and the territorial dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands. Although Japan takes China's regional ambitions seriously, these are not perceived as threatening the nation's survival. Its foremost strategic focus

remains on the Korean Peninsula, where China is viewed as a powerful influencer rather than a direct aggressor.

Vietnam also considers China a core threat, particularly in light of persistent confrontations in the South China Sea. A 2017 Pew Research survey found that 92% of Vietnamese respondents viewed China's growing power and influence as a national threat (Nguyen, 2019). However, as with Japan, the concern is territorial rather than existential. Though Vietnam and China fought a brief but intense war in 1979, Beijing's objectives were limited and punitive, not aimed at regime change or full annexation. The ongoing maritime disputes, while deeply consequently, do not carry the same totalizing implications as Beijing's blanket claim over Taiwan.

It is therefore analytically useful to distinguish between degrees of threat among these observers. While Japan and Vietnam perceive China as a realistic and credible security concern, the scale, immediacy, and totalizing nature of Beijing's threat to Taiwan places it in a category of its own. China does not merely contest Taiwan's policies or territory—it contests its right to exist as a sovereign entity. Thus, Taiwan's fear is not just of conflict, but of eradication. For this reason, Taiwan stands as the most acutely threatened observer state in this comparative framework.

3.2.2.2 Symbolic Threat: United States, United Kingdom, and European Union

By 2019, American public opinion and policymaking were increasingly wary of China. The first Trump administration categorized China as a geostrategic rival and initiated his trade war. According to Chicago Council Survey, however, 68% of the surveyed preferred friendly cooperation and engagement with China (Friedhoff et al, 2019). While not facing an existential

threat, or fearing any direct confrontation with China, the U.S. faces symbolic threat as it fears China as a rival, ideological other, and threat to liberal democracies.

If the U.S. has a fear of losing hegemonic dominance to the rising power of China, then the U.K. and E.U. had even less reason to feel threatened. They are likewise weary of China's ideological and political differences, its threat to democracy, and potential disruption, but has no real reason to feel any realistic threat to themselves.

3.2.2.3 Minimal Threat: Global South States

In 2019, many countries across Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia viewed China as a partner rather than a threat. Prioritizing investment and infrastructure funding from Beijing, Many African and Latin American nations benefit from Chinese infrastructure investments and development finance under initiatives like the Belt and Road and Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). For them, vehemently opposing China carries tangible costs—fearing repercussions for aid, loans, trade deals, and diplomatic goodwill. Though they might fear China for economic expansion and imperialism, they are not realistically or symbolically in danger of a Chinese military incursion, in fact, supporting a non-interference norm fit many post-colonial country's own agenda by focusing on respecting sovereignty rather than the Right to Protect.

Comparison of the Threat Perception

Table 6 Comparative Summary: Threat of China in 2019

Observer State	Threat Type	Basis for Fear
Taiwan	Existential	Claim over sovereignty
Japan	Realistic	Maritime territorial dispute, rivalry
Vietnam	Realistic	Maritime territorial dispute
U.S.	Symbolic	Rivalry, threat to norm
U.K./EU	Symbolic	Threat to norm
Global South	Minimal	Economic friction

3.2.3 Predictive Typology Based on Theory

Quadrant Analysis and Predictions

High Empathy × High Threat (Solidarity Hawk) → Strong Reaction

Example: Taiwan

Taiwan uniquely embodies both deep emotional identification with Hong Kong and existential fear of Chinese aggression. Shared cultural, linguistic, and political trajectories heighten public empathy, while China's explicit territorial claims create a profound sense of urgency.

Prediction: Strong reaction—widespread public support, policy alignment, civil society mobilization, and electoral consequences.

Mixed Typology (Non-committal Hedger) → Moderate/Symbolic Reaction

Examples: U.K., Singapore, Japan, Vietnam, U.S.

U.S., Japan, and Vietnam might perceive China as a strategic or military challenge but lack strong affective or ideological connection with Hong Kong. The U.S., while critical of Chinese authoritarianism, approaches the issue from a broader great-power rivalry frame rather than empathetic solidarity. Public identification with Hong Kong remains limited, and responses are calculated and interest driven. Japan and Vietnam might feel threatened by China, but there is little reason to think they would have close ties to the people in Hong Kong. Both the United Kingdom and Singapore share strong historical and normative ties with Hong Kong. In the U.K.'s case, colonial history and liberal values fuel rhetorical support. Singapore, while culturally proximate, is not a traditional democratic state and might prioritize stability over individual freedom. The lack of immediate threat to either U.K or Singapore would also temper

the depth of response.

Prediction: Moderate or symbolic reaction—rhetorical condemnation, limited policy changes, support for democratic norms without escalation.

Low Empathy × Low Threat → Weak Reaction

Examples: EU, Global South

These states neither identify closely with Hong Kong nor perceive China as a pressing threat. The European Union expresses normative concern but is constrained by economic interdependence and internal fragmentation. Global South countries often emphasize non-interference and prioritize ties with Beijing.

Prediction: Weak reaction—neutrality, muted statements, or tacit support for China's sovereignty position.

Table 7 Typological Matrix Empathy x Threat

	High Threat	Low Threat
High Empathy	**Taiwan (Solidarity Hawk)** Shared cultural, linguistic, and political identity Existential fear of being "next" **Prediction: Strong reaction**	**U.K., Singapore (Non-committal Hedger)** Historical ties, democratic values, moral concern No direct security risk **Prediction: Moderate/symbolic reaction**
Low Empathy	**Japan, Vietnam, U.S(Non-committal Hedger)** Strategic concern, disputes Lack of close ties with protest movement **Prediction: moderate/limited reaction**	**EU, Global South (Peripheral Onlooker)** No strong emotional or ideological ties to Hong Kong Economic dependence on China, preference for neutrality **Prediction: weak reaction**

This typology demonstrates how varying combinations of empathy and threat shaped the diversity of global responses to the Hong Kong crackdown. The strongest and most consequential reactions came from states that both felt for Hong Kong and feared for themselves—Taiwan being the most vivid example. Where only empathy or threat was present, responses were more measured or compartmentalized. Where neither was present, indifference or acquiescence prevailed. This model helps us understand not just who reacted, but why they did or did not, and provides a useful tool for forecasting global reactions to future violence.

3.3 Empirical Tests of Hypothesis 1: Heightened Interest

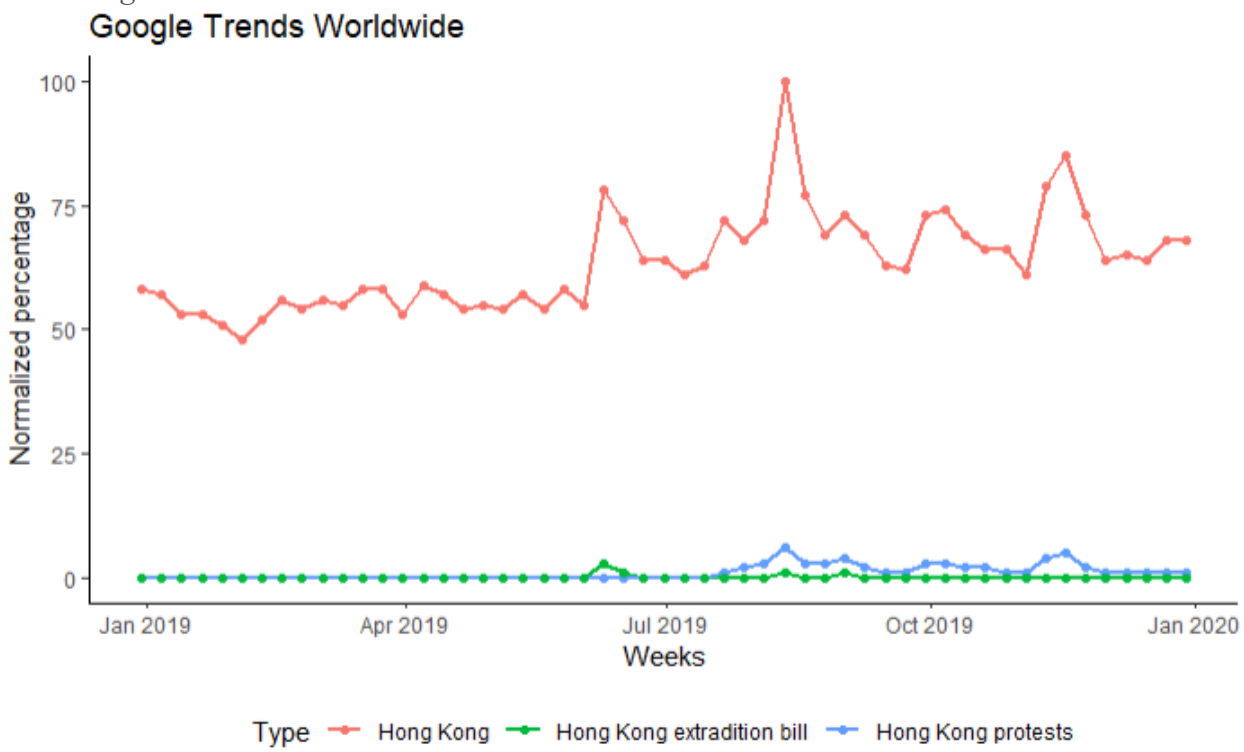
Now it is time to check if our predictions based on the typology play out accordingly. First, my Hypothesis 1 suggests that empathy with the victim and fear of the perpetrator should create heightened interest. Thus, we should see a variety of indicators that show a gradient of interest level based on the observer state. My prediction would put Taiwan as the most interested observer. While the non-committal hedgers would generate a spectrum of interest level but far

behind that of Taiwan. While the Low Empathy x Low Fear (peripheral onlooker) states such as the E.U. and the Global South would have little interest compared to the others.

3.3.1 Cross-National Google Trends Analysis

To test Hypothesis 1—that heightened empathy toward the victim group and perceived threat from the perpetrator state amplify observer interest in foreign violence—this section analyzes search behavior across countries during the 2019 Hong Kong protests. In an age of digital information, the intensity of public engagement can be gauged by examining internet search data, particularly through Google Trends. This publicly available tool allows for real-time insights into public interest by tracking the frequency of keyword searches over time.

Figure 1



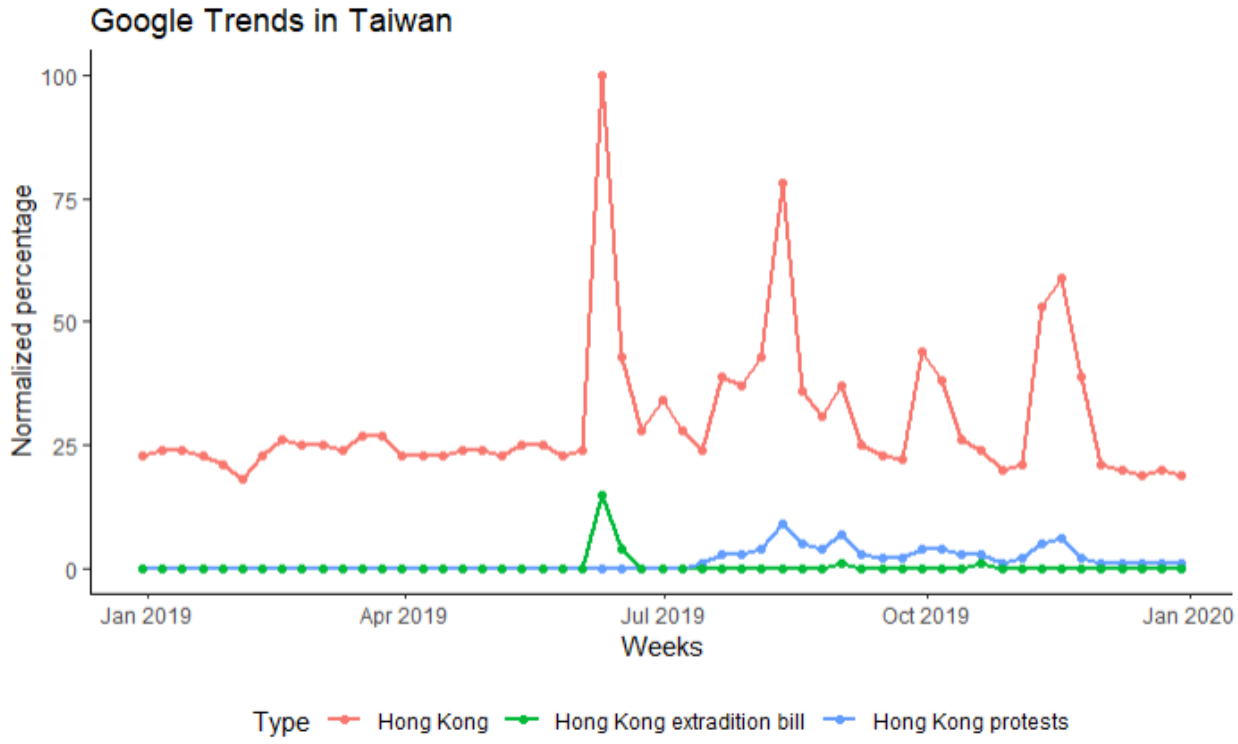
Measuring Global Attention to the Hong Kong Protests

Figure 1 presents the global Google Trends data for the term "Hong Kong" between January 2019 and January 2021. Notably, the data is normalized: the week with the highest

relative search volume is set at one hundred, with all other values scaled accordingly. This peak occurred in mid-August 2019, coinciding with the protest occupation and shutdown of the Hong Kong International Airport—a development that had both symbolic and practical global impact, particularly on international travelers.

The global search timeline reveals four major peaks throughout 2019. Each aligns closely with a key flashpoint of violent repression or government escalation in Hong Kong, supporting the hypothesis that public attention abroad is most acutely triggered by episodes of state-perpetrated violence.

Figure 2



Taiwan (Solidarity Hawk): High Empathy, High Threat

According to the theory outlined in Chapter 2, Taiwan stands as the archetypal case of a third-party observer that exhibits both high empathetic identification with Hong Kong and intense perceived existential threat from China. Google Trends data strongly supports this

theoretical expectation. As shown in Figure 2, Taiwan's search interest in topics such as "Hong Kong extradition bill" and "Hong Kong protests" far outpaces global patterns in both magnitude and focus.

While global interest surged during dramatic events, Taiwanese interest began earlier and spiked more dramatically suggesting deeper attentiveness and emotional investment. For example, during the week of June 9–15, 2019—when the first major clash at Admiralty ("612") occurred—searches for "extradition bill" in Taiwan reached peak levels, even before the international community's attention peaked in August. This early and intense engagement illustrates that Taiwanese citizens possessed both the contextual knowledge and political interest to make more targeted and issue-specific inquiries.

Importantly, the normalization process used by Google Trends can obscure absolute levels of attention. In Taiwan, search interest quadrupled during the June protests compared to previous weeks. In contrast, global interest merely doubled during its peak, meaning Taiwan's relative surge was proportionally much greater. This underscores that Taiwanese citizens were not only more responsive, but also more consistently engaged.

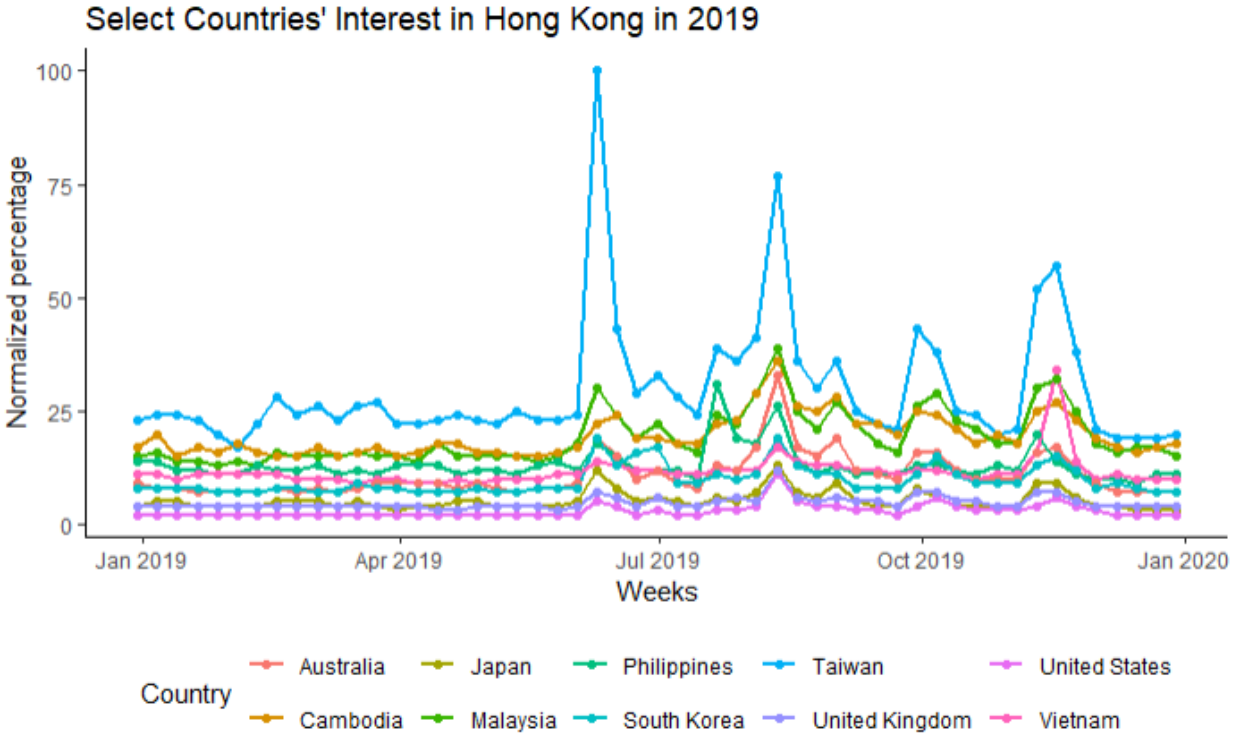
Comparative Analysis Across States

To test the broader typological predictions outlined in Section 3.2.3, Figure 3 compares search interest trends from several representative countries, categorized by their combinations of empathy and threat:

- **High Empathy × High Threat**: Taiwan
- **Mixed Typology**: United Kingdom, Singapore, Japan, United States, Vietnam
- **Low Empathy × Low Threat**: Malaysia, EU states (limited data), African nations (often unrecorded)

The results are striking. Taiwan exhibits consistently higher and more frequent spikes in search interest, clearly distinguishing itself from other observers. Its curve towers above those of all other states, validating the theoretical expectation that both empathy and threat perceptions are necessary for elevated interest. By contrast, countries like the U.S., U.K., and Malaysia show more subdued patterns, with less frequent or less intense peaks. In some cases—especially across the Global South—no measurable trend appears from African states, confirming minimal interest in the Hong Kong events.

Figure 3



Temporal Alignment with Protest Violence

The timing of search spikes further corroborates the link between state violence and international interest. Across all countries, the four highest peaks correspond precisely with the major episodes of government repression:

1. June 12, 2019 – "612" clash at Admiralty: First major use of force by Hong Kong Police

2. August 12–14, 2019 – Airport occupation and violence
3. Late September to early October 2019 – Solidarity protests abroad, use of live ammunition, and the mask ban
4. November 2019 – Sieges at CUHK and PolyU

Interestingly, the July 1st storming of the Legislative Council, while symbolically potent and heavily covered by media—did not generate a comparable spike in search interest. One plausible explanation is that the violence on that day was perpetrated primarily by protesters, and the government's response was relatively restrained. As argued in the theoretical framework, public interest tends to spike when violent repression is committed by a state actor, especially a geopolitical rival. Conversely, violence initiated by democratic protestors often generates less international threat perception and thus less attention.

Implications

This analysis yields two core insights. First, international attention to foreign violence is highly episodic and reactive - strongly driven by observable moments of state-perpetrated repression. Second, the degree of attention varies significantly across observer states, largely in line with theoretical expectations based on empathy and threat. Taiwan's distinct position at the intersection of highly empathetic with Hong Kong and highly fearful of China rendered it uniquely attentive, whereas other states exhibited only muted or symbolic interest.

Google search behavior, while imperfect, offers a valuable proxy for mass-level political salience. These patterns affirm that third-party observers are neither uniformly indifferent nor uniformly attentive to foreign repression. Rather, their level of engagement reflects deeper psychological mechanisms rooted in empathy, and perceived threat—precisely as the theory of violence spillover predicts.

3.3.2 Subnational Variation in Attention

While the previous section (3.3.1) demonstrated clear cross-national variation in attention to the Hong Kong protests, understanding within-country differences provides deeper insight into the mechanisms of empathy and threat perception at the local level. According to Hypothesis 1, subnational regions with higher levels of cosmopolitanism, greater internet connectivity, or more substantial expatriate populations from Hong Kong should display heightened interest in the protests. To test these predictions, this section utilizes subnational Google Trends data to examine how internal regional differences within selected countries reflect varying levels of identification and threat perception.

Taiwan: Urban-Rural Divide and Cosmopolitanism

Google Trends data for Taiwan clearly reveals internal variation in attention. Taipei, the capital and largest metropolitan area, exhibits the highest level of interest in "Hong Kong protests," indexed at one hundred. By contrast, interest levels in other major Taiwanese regions such as Kaohsiung, Taichung, and Tainan range significantly lower, from 58% to 67% relative to Taipei. This supports the theoretical expectation that urban centers—particularly political and economic hubs like Taipei, with extensive international connections and more significant expatriate communities—show heightened empathy and concern for foreign events.

Taipei's status as Taiwan's main international gateway and its dense networks of economic, cultural, and political interactions with Hong Kong enhance identification and perceived proximity. Furthermore, the higher penetration of internet penetration, education levels, and international exposure characteristic of urban populations align with theoretical expectations regarding cosmopolitanism and empathy.

United States: Regional Proximity and Immigrant Communities

Figure 4 State level Distribution of Search Interest in U.S.

The United States provides an instructive case for examining subnational variation due to its size and demographic diversity. State-level Google Trends data reveals significant regional differences: California registers the highest level of interest at one hundred, closely followed by Hawaii at 96 and the District of Columbia at 90. Notably, California and Hawaii are geographically closer to Hong Kong and have substantial immigrant populations from East Asia, including many Hong Kong expatriates. The high interest in Washington D.C. aligns with its status as the nation's political center, highlighting strategic rather than empathetic considerations. According to Pew (2019), the five metropolitan areas showing the highest concentration of Chinese (and Taiwanese) Americans—New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Washington, and Honolulu—align with the top five observed Google Trends regions for “Hong Kong protests” .

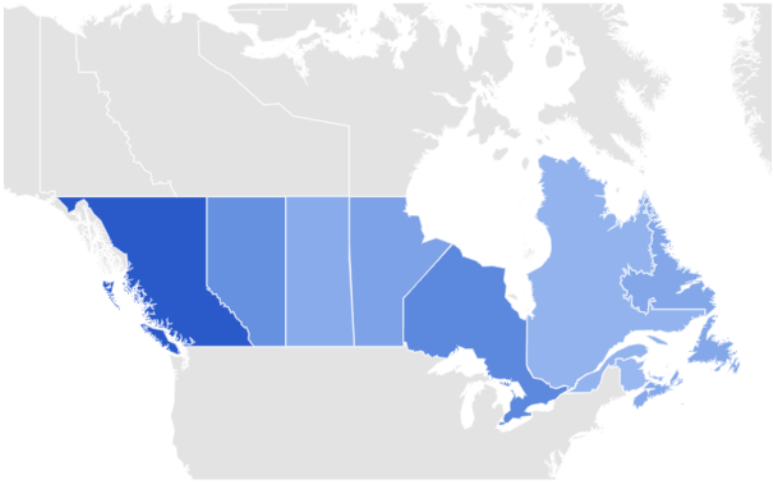
Figure 5 Metropolitan level Distribution of Search Interest in U.S.

Metro-level data further reinforces the theoretical predictions. The top five metropolitan areas with the highest interest in the Hong Kong protests are San Francisco Bay Area, Honolulu, Los Angeles, New York, and Seattle-Tacoma—all known hubs of significant East Asian and Hong Kong immigrant populations. Specifically, cities within these metros, such as San Gabriel, Monterey Park, and Rosemead in Los Angeles, exhibit even greater interest, directly correlating with their large Chinese and Hong Kong diasporas. According to the 2020 census data, Suburban "ethnoburbs" like Monterey Park, Rowland Heights, and San Gabriel in the L.A. area exhibit Asian/Chinese American populations between 43–63%, coupled with robust Chinese-language business networks, reinforcing their status as diaspora hubs. The broader national context shows approximately 5.4 million Chinese Americans—with half residing in California and New York—suggesting that state and metro-level interest calculations reflect well-established immigrant community distributions.

This finding strongly supports the theory that cosmopolitan and immigrant-rich urban centers demonstrate intensified empathetic responses, driven by direct personal and cultural ties to affected foreign communities.

Canada: West Coast and Expatriate Concentration

Figure 6 Provincial level Distribution of Search Interest in Canada



In Canada, Google Trends highlights British Columbia (B.C.) as the region most attentive to the Hong Kong events, indexing at one hundred, nearly double that of Ontario (52). British Columbia's geographic proximity to Asia and the high concentration of Hong Kong immigrants—particularly in metropolitan Vancouver—make it a natural focal point for heightened empathetic identification. This subnational pattern in Canada mirrors the findings in the U.S., underscoring the significance of immigrant presence and geographic closeness in shaping local-level attentiveness to foreign violence.

Russia: Geographic Proximity and Regional Variation

Figure 7 Provincial level Distribution of Search Interest in Russia

Russia's vast geography presents a valuable opportunity to examine regional variation driven by physical proximity. Google Trends data indicates that the highest levels of attention emerged from the Far East regions, specifically Khabarovsk Krai (100), Sakhalin Oblast (89), and Primorsky Krai (86). These regions, geographically closest to East Asia, naturally have stronger economic and social ties to China and the Asia-Pacific region, facilitating greater local interest and awareness. Moscow also demonstrates elevated interest (62), consistent with its status as a political and diplomatic hub.

This Russian example demonstrates that even in contexts without significant expatriate communities, geographic proximity alone can enhance regional attentiveness, reinforcing theoretical predictions regarding threat perception and empathetic identification.

Implications and Conclusions

The consistent patterns observed across diverse national contexts confirm the theoretical expectations: subnational regions characterized by urban cosmopolitanism, geographic proximity, or significant expatriate communities exhibit stronger empathetic identification and greater attentiveness to foreign violent events. These findings underscore the importance of

considering internal regional differences when analyzing how international conflicts resonate within third-party states, offering valuable insights for policymakers seeking to anticipate and manage domestic public reactions to global events.

3.4 Evidence for Hypothesis 2: Identification and Support for Victims

The theory of violence spillover predicts that a High Empathy x High Fear (Solidarity Hawk) combination would prompt observers in the third-party to strengthen its support and identify even closer with the victimized group of the violence. In this case, we should then see Taiwan taking up the most drastic supportive measures towards Hong Kong protestors, nations in the mixed categories such as U.K., U.S, Japan to take measured but limited supportive actions, while the Low x Low combination would provide little to no support or withdraw support from or worsen its ties with the victim group.

Solidarity Hawk – Taiwan

Figure 8 Pro-Democracy Supports in Taipei

Pro-democracy supporters in Taipei hold artwork reading "Hong Kong Holds Strong" during a solidarity rally amid the 2019 protests (Sam Yeh/AFP)

Democratic governments and civil societies around the world reacted to the 2019–2020 Hong Kong unrest with conspicuous gestures of solidarity. This included official motions and statements of support, as well as grassroots campaigns and cultural initiatives, all indicative of a strong empathetic identification with Hong Kong's pro-democracy protesters. Taiwan took a leading role in this regard. President Tsai Ing-wen delivered a speech the day after the "612" Admiralty clash and offered unequivocal moral support early in the protests. She foregrounds the universality of democratic values, repeatedly emphasizing terms such as "democracy," "freedom," and "human rights," thereby situating Taiwan as the steadfast "bastion of democracy in Asia." This principled positioning is further reinforced through frequent use of collective pronouns ("we," "Taiwan people"), which underscores a sense of shared identity and responsibility between her government and the public, as well as a keen sense of empathetic identification with Hong Kong citizens. The tone of the speech is resolute and unwavering, particularly in Tsai's rejection of the "one country, two systems" framework, which she asserts is both infeasible and unacceptable for democratic Taiwan. Her statements are unambiguous and assertive, most notably when she declares, "As long as Tsai Ing-wen is here, it will not succeed," projecting a personal and institutional commitment to safeguarding Taiwan's sovereignty. Tsai's language is also deeply empathetic, as she describes the use of tear gas and rubber bullets against Hong Kong demonstrators as "shocking and intolerable," and acknowledges the legitimate rights of Hong Kong citizens to pursue their own democracy and way of life. This rhetorical empathy serves to morally align Taiwan with the victims of state repression, reinforcing the emotional solidarity that underpins third-party mobilization in response to foreign violence. (President's Office, June 13, 2019).

This solidarity was rooted in a shared sense of fate ("Today's Hong Kong, Tomorrow's Taiwan") and was widely echoed in Taiwanese society. Across 2019, Taiwanese cities saw large rallies and vigils in support of Hong Kong; citizens gathered with Hong Kong flags, sang protest anthems, and created "Lennon Walls" of sticky-note messages echoing those in Hong Kong (Al Jazeera, 9/29/2019). Taiwanese NGOs also mobilized to assist for example, local groups quietly helped dozens of Hong Kong activists who fled to Taiwan following the siege of Hong Kong's legislature in July 2019. Despite the lack of a formal asylum law, Taiwan's authorities indicated they would handle such cases "under the principle of respecting human rights protections and humanitarian concerns," and provide "necessary assistance to Hong Kong residents whose safety and freedom are in urgent danger due to political reasons" (The Guardian, 7/19/2019). This direct, hands-on engagement culminated in the establishment of a special Taiwan-Hong Kong Services and Exchanges Office on 1 July 2020 to facilitate Hong Kong migrants' applications to study, work or reside in Taiwan. Beijing angrily denounced Taipei's outreach as interference, yet Taiwan's officials continued to welcome Hong Kong dissidents, balancing humanitarian obligation with caution for Taiwan's security (Reuters, June 18, 2020).

At the grassroots level, diaspora communities and civil society organizations around the globe launched their own pro-Hong Kong campaigns. Throughout 2019, hundreds of thousands of people in dozens of cities worldwide participated in solidarity demonstrations. On 29 September 2019, for example, coordinated rallies took place in over forty cities – from Sydney and Taipei to London, New York, Vancouver, and Tokyo – under the banner of an "anti-totalitarianism" day of action. Protesters abroad echoed Hong Kong's slogans ("Fight for Freedom, stand with Hong Kong") and even adopted protest tactics such as human chains and singing the anthem "Glory to Hong Kong" in public (Al Jazeera, 9/29/2019). The largest protest,

expectedly, occurred in Taipei on that day, an estimated 2,000 people gathered outside Taiwan's parliament despite torrential rain to back Hong Kong's struggle. And noticeably, in most other cities, Hong Kong émigré makes up the bulwark of the protesting crowd, but Taiwan's crowd had higher level of local participation.

Aside from the traditional venues of protest support, some activist groups produced innovative ideas. In 2020, activists and netizens in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand famously coalesced into the "Milk Tea Alliance," an online solidarity movement named after their shared love of milk-infused tea drinks. This internet-born alliance – soon joined by activists in Myanmar and elsewhere – facilitated cross-border moral support, information-sharing, and joint campaigns against authoritarianism. Protesters in Bangkok, for example, explicitly drew inspiration from Hong Kong's tactics and received online encouragement from Hong Kong and Taiwanese users. Meme art depicting milk teacups from different countries holding hands symbolized the sense of a common cause. While largely symbolic, the Milk Tea Alliance exemplified how civil society actors in various Asian democracies identified with Hong Kong's plight and sought to construct a shared transnational identity of resistance. (The Guardian, 10/25/2020)

Taiwan's empathetic stance – treating Hong Kong's cause as intertwined with Taiwan's own democratic identity – exemplified bilateral engagement driven by identification with the protest movement.

Moderate and Limited Responses from the Non-committal Hedgers

A set of Western democracies and Japan displayed substantial but more calibrated engagement with Hong Kong's protest movement. These actors typically had either strong empathy with Hong Kong's democratic aspirations or a significant threat perception regarding

China's influence – but not both factors at maximal levels – resulting in moderate support that was often symbolic or selective in scope.

United Kingdom: Owing to its historical ties and legal commitments to Hong Kong, the UK showed high empathy (a sense of responsibility for Hong Kong's freedoms) even if the direct security threat from China's Hong Kong policy to the UK was limited. British leaders were vocal in diplomatic channels: Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, for example, condemned Beijing's breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and vowed the UK "will not turn our backs" on Hong Kong's people. The UK regularly raised Hong Kong at the United Nations and in the G7 meetings and continued its longstanding practice of publishing biannual reports on Hong Kong's status. In terms of bilateral interactions, British political figures engaged with Hong Kong democracy advocates – a notable instance being Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong's visit to London in 2019, during which he met cross-party MPs to brief them on the protests (a move that drew Beijing's ire). Protest solidarity was also visible among the British public and diaspora; rallies by Hong Kong expatriates in Britain underscored popular support for the cause.

United States: The U.S. response combined ideological affinity for Hong Kong's democracy movement with a sharpening strategic rivalry with China, yielding engagement driven by both empathy and threat (though U.S. policymakers often framed it primarily in terms of supporting freedom). American lawmakers took the rare step of inviting Hong Kong activists to testify before Congress during the turmoil. In September 2019, prominent figures like Joshua Wong and Denise Ho spoke at a U.S. Congressional hearing, galvanizing bipartisan support for Hong Kong's demands (The Diplomat, July 06, 2020). High-level U.S. officials also met Hong Kong dissidents (e.g., Wong's meeting with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in 2019 became a potent symbol of U.S. solidarity). The U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong visibly supported

civil society (for instance, by sheltering a teen protester for a brief period in 2019, according to media reports, though without official confirmation). These interactions were buttressed by strong rhetoric: the State Department and White House frequently lauded the "courage" of Hong Kong's people and condemned police crackdowns. Washington's engagement thus went beyond words to direct outreach in the form of sanctions against HK officials: an expression of empathy with Hong Kong's democratic struggle and an assertion of U.S. resolve against the perceived threat of China's authoritarian expansion. (Chinese officials responded by accusing the U.S. of fomenting the unrest, even citing the meetings and testimonies as "evidence" of foreign instigation) (The Guardian, Aug 7, 2020). Despite Beijing's accusations, U.S. cross-party consensus in support of Hong Kong endured, translating into both continued contacts with Hong Kong activists and the formulation of supportive legislation.

Canada: Canada's engagement was driven by a combination of values and a large Hong Kong diaspora that made the issue salient domestically. Empathy ran high among Canadians as 300,000 Canadian citizens in Hong Kong and countless Canadians of Hong Kong origin watched the protest events with concern. In Canadian cities like Vancouver and Toronto, protesters rallied in solidarity with Hong Kong's calls for democracy (often waving Canada and Hong Kong flags side by side). Canadian parliamentarians formed multi-party groups pressing the government to act; dozens of MPs urged offering a "safe harbor" program for Hong Kong protestors fleeing persecution (The Guardian, Oct 16, 2020). This public and elite sentiment translated into bilateral interactions characterized by support and advocacy. Canadian diplomats in Hong Kong quietly increased liaison with pro-democracy figures and routinely attended trials of arrested activists as observers. Ottawa also did not shy from directly confronting Beijing on Hong Kong's issues in bilateral dialogues: officials raised the treatment of protesters in meetings with China's

Foreign Ministry and the Hong Kong government. The Chinese government's reaction was openly hostile – China's Ambassador Cong Peiwu in October 2020 warned Canada against granting asylum to "violent criminals" from Hong Kong, pointedly reminding Ottawa of the safety of Canadian passport-holders and businesses in Hong Kong as if to imply they could be at risk (The Guardian, Oct 16, 2020). Despite such veiled threats, Canada maintained a level of engagement (e.g., continuing to speak out and preparing immigration measures), reflecting high empathy moderated by the awareness of China's leverage over Canadian interests.

Japan: Japan's response was the most restrained among the mixed typography categories, reflecting a more distant empathy and a complicated threat calculus. Culturally, there was sympathy in Japan for Hong Kong's plight – Japanese media gave extensive coverage to the protests, and small-scale solidarity rallies were held by activists in Tokyo and Osaka. Strategically, Japan is wary of China's rise (heightening threat perceptions), but its economic interdependence with China and traditionally cautious foreign policy limited direct engagement. Still, Japan broke from its usually muted approach to Chinese domestic issues by deploying harsher diplomatic language than before: after Beijing passed the National Security Law, Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi stated it was "regrettable" and would undermine trust in the "one country, two systems" framework (Al Jazeera, July 1, 2020). This marked one of Tokyo's strongest official critiques of China's Hong Kong policy. Japan also quietly coordinated with Western partners – it signed on to G7 statements urging China to reconsider and, according to diplomatic sources, weighed halting certain bilateral programs with Hong Kong. Yet, Japan did not engage deeply with Hong Kong's opposition on a person-to-person level; there were no known high-profile meetings between Japanese ministers and Hong Kong activists, for instance. Instead, Japan explored indirect avenues of support that aligned with its own interests: the Abe

government discussed easing entry rules to attract Hong Kong financial professionals and businesses uneasy with the new law (South China Morning Post, 6/27/2020). Such measures would offer Hong Kongers an exit option and signal disapproval of Beijing's crackdown, albeit without overtly positioning Japan as a champion of the protest movement. In short, Japan's bilateral engagement was largely rhetorical and economic; empathy was evident in Japan's concern for Hong Kong's freedoms, and threat awareness lurked in its strategic calculations, but both were tempered by a desire to avoid a frontal confrontation with China.

Overall, countries in the mixed typographic groups (Non-committal Hedgers) exhibited a large degree of variation in their level of response and bilateral interactions with the Hong Kong protesters. However, it is clear both Taiwan's official actions and grassroot activism is the strongest when it comes to showing solidarity and support towards the Hong Kong protesters. Also note that most of the reactions from these states came in mid to late 2020, a year after the major milestone events on Hong Kong ground (and in response the imposed National Security Law rather than the protest itself). Taiwan on the other hand, reacted much more strongly and immediately as the situation develops in Hong Kong.

Muted and Response for the Peripheral Onlooker

Many democracies in continental Europe, as well as developing states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, exhibited minimal direct engagement with the Hong Kong protesters. Generally lacking strong cultural or historical identification with Hong Kong (lower empathy) and not perceiving China's actions there as an acute threat to their national interests, these countries confined their responses largely to formal statements or abstained altogether from involvement.

European Union: Outside of the UK, which took a lead, most EU members were circumspect. Public opinion in Europe tended to sympathize with Hong Kong's pro-democracy cause, but this did not always translate into proactive government engagement. European diplomats did not coordinate meetings with Hong Kong activists on the scale of U.S. or UK lawmakers, nor did European governments offer protestors concrete assistance such as asylum programs. Instead, their engagement was mostly multilateral and declaratory. For example, the EU collectively issued statements of "deep concern" and urged China to uphold Hong Kong's rights, but these were often generalized appeals (Al Jazeera, July 1, 2020). Some individual countries took symbolic steps: Germany's foreign minister met discreetly with exiled Hong Kong activist Nathan Law in 2020, and the French and German embassies in China jointly hosted a seminar on the Hong Kong situation with academics – low-key outreach efforts indicative of concern but also caution. Notably, when the Hong Kong government postponed its Legislative Council elections in 2020 and disqualified pro-democracy candidates, Germany responded by suspending its extradition agreement with Hong Kong as an immediate protest (Politico, 7/31/2020). This aligned Germany with the firmer Anglophone stance, although such moves were the exception in Europe rather than the norm. In general, EU states' bilateral interactions with "pro-Hong Kong" actors were limited; there was no broad campaign to welcome Hong Kong dissidents (with rare exceptions of quiet individual asylum grants in Germany and others). The tepid engagement reflected Europe's lower stakes: Hong Kong's struggle, while tragic, was geographically distant and secondary to EU's core interests, and many EU leaders prioritized not antagonizing China (a vital trading partner) beyond issuing official criticisms. Thus, on a bilateral level, European democracies offered muted support – moral

sympathy and occasional diplomatic gestures, but little in terms of direct involvement or assistance.

Global South: In Asia, Africa, and Latin America, governments largely abstained from the Hong Kong issue or sided with Beijing's narrative. Countries such as India, South Africa, Brazil, and Indonesia – each democratic to varying degrees – did not mount any significant engagement with Hong Kong's protest movement. Reasons varied, from deference to the principle of non-interference, to strong economic ties with China, to simply low public resonance of the issue. In some cases, leaders in these countries expressed implicit support for China's position that the protests were China's internal affair. For instance, Pakistan and several African states endorsed statements at the UN praising China's "restoration of order" in Hong Kong. The clearest illustration of this dynamic was at the UN Human Rights Council in July 2020: a coalition of 53 states – predominantly from the Global South – backed China's National Security Law for Hong Kong, whereas only 27 (mostly Western) states criticized it. The pro-Beijing cohort (including many developing states) emphasized each nation's sovereign right to ensure security and echoed Beijing's claims that the law would safeguard Hong Kong's prosperity (The Diplomat, July 6, 2020). This diplomatic alignment translated into a near-total absence of bilateral pro-Hong Kong engagement: no official visits or delegations in support of the protesters, no special visas or refugee intakes, and often silence in the face of Hong Kong authorities' crackdown. Indeed, some governments in Asia and the Middle East went as far as to assist China's stance (for example, by arresting or deporting exiled Hong Kong activists at Beijing's request, as reportedly occurred in Thailand and Dubai in 2020). Such actions underscore that in the last group, empathetic identification with Hong Kong's democratic movement was minimal, and perceived threat from its suppression negligible or outweighed by

the desire to maintain good relations with China. The prevailing approach was to avoid involvement – or in some cases, to explicitly endorse Beijing's measures – thereby offering virtually no bilateral support to Hong Kong's protesters during their time of crisis.

In summary, the bilateral interactions of third-party democracies with the Hong Kong protest movement in 2019–2020 varied dramatically by tier. From Taiwan's hands-on assistance and the Western allies' symbolic outreach, to the cautious distance of Europe and the acquiescence of much of the Global South, these patterns reflect how shared democratic identity and strategic risk perception combined to drive or dampen engagement with Hong Kong's struggle.

3.5 Evidence for Hypothesis 3: Rising Hostility towards the Perpetrator - China

The prior section demonstrated how the typology made correct predictions regarding offered support towards the victim in the wake of violent repression. We now turn to the other side of that dynamic. Hypothesis 3 posits that witnessing brutal violence abroad can provoke hostility toward the perpetrator state. Taiwan's political reversal between 2018 and 2020 provides a vivid case study of this mechanism. In particular, China's hardline response to Hong Kong's 2019 pro-democracy protests – marked by police brutality and authoritarian crackdowns – resonated powerfully in Taiwan. The island's citizens empathized with Hong Kong's beleaguered protesters and grew fearful that "today's Hong Kong" might portend "tomorrow's Taiwan." This combination of identification with the victims and heightened threat perception toward China (the perpetrator) helped reshape Taiwan's electoral landscape, fueling a dramatic resurgence of the anti-China Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and a corresponding decline of the more China-friendly Kuomintang (KMT**)**. I organize the evidence in three parts: first, the

2018 baseline when the DPP suffered major losses amid low salience of cross-Strait threats; second, the Hong Kong protest crisis of 2019 and its impact on Taiwanese public sentiment; and third, the 2020 elections, in which anti-China backlash translated into concrete electoral outcomes. Throughout, we draw on public opinion polls and campaign rhetoric to demonstrate how hostility toward China surged in Taiwan in response to the Hong Kong turmoil in comparison with other states, consistent with our theoretical framework of third-party mobilization.

3.5.1 Electoral Shifts in Taiwan: 2018–2020

Taiwan in late 2018 had a political landscape favorable to the pro-Beijing camp. In the November 2018 "nine-in-one" local elections, the KMT scored sweeping victories, seizing 15 of 21 major cities and counties' executive posts (up from just 6) and winning nearly 49% of the popular vote, while the DPP's share fell below 40%. President Tsai Ing-wen's approval rating had plunged into the twenties amid voter discontent with her domestic reforms and cross-Strait policy. The youthful populist KMT candidate Han Kuo-yu won an upset mayoral race in the DPP stronghold of Kaohsiung – a shocking triumph dubbed the "Han wave" – by campaigning on closer economic ties with China and promises of prosperity. The KMT's 2018 surge was widely interpreted as a public rebuke of the DPP's pro-independence leanings and a sign that Taiwanese voters prioritized bread-and-butter issues over China threats. Cross-Strait relations had receded as an electoral issue; indeed, the KMT had long claimed it offered a *safer* approach to Beijing, portraying the DPP as needlessly provocative in its pursuit of a distinct Taiwanese identity (Rigger, 2020). In short, by the end of 2018 the DPP was on the back foot and the KMT appeared ascendant, buoyed by an electorate then relatively complacent about the "China factor." Tsai Ing-wen was considered so unlikely to win a second term that members of her own party

openly urged her not to run for re-election (Nachman, 2019). She actually stepped down as the head of the DPP while still in office as the President. Any latent public fears of China were, at this stage, overshadowed by domestic concerns, and the hostility toward China hypothesized in H3 had yet to manifest.

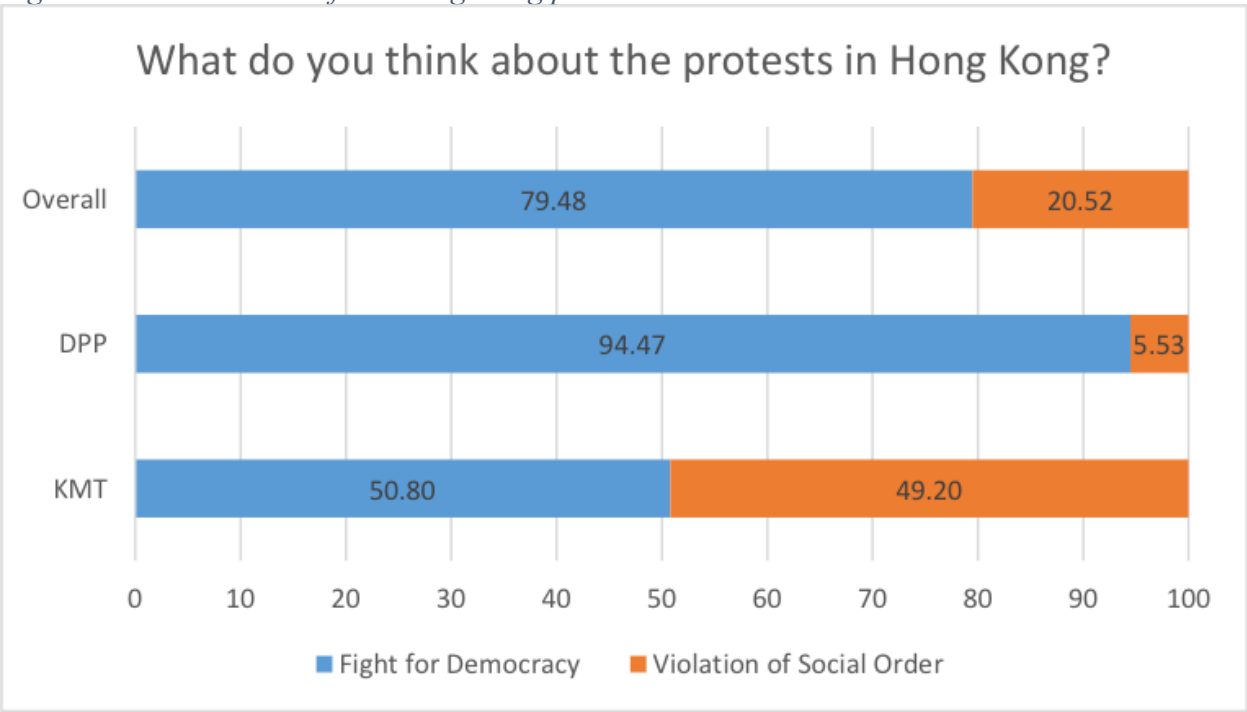
Hong Kong's 2019 Protest Crisis and Rising Anti-China Sentiment

This trend was upended in 2019. A chain of events – beginning with Chinese President Xi Jinping's New Year's speech reasserting the goal of unification under a "one country, two systems" (1C2S) model, and then the eruption of mass protests in Hong Kong against a Beijing-backed extradition bill – suddenly made the China threat tangible and salient in Taiwan. President Tsai reacted to Xi's speech by unequivocally rejecting 1C2S for Taiwan, which won her praise at home and primed the public to pay attention to Hong Kong's plight (Rigger, 2020). When Hong Kong's peaceful demonstrations escalated into clashes and violent police crackdowns over mid-2019, Taiwanese citizens were transfixed. As shown earlier, Google search trends provide one striking indicator: in Taiwan, online searches related to "Hong Kong protests" quadrupled during the June 2019 protest peak compared to prior weeks, a far greater surge than observed globally. Ordinarily, Taiwan's public pays little attention to Hong Kong, but now the island's media featured daily images of tear gas and street battles. This created a widespread sense in Taiwan of déjà vu *and foreshadowing*. The slogan "Today Hong Kong, Tomorrow Taiwan" gained popular currency, encapsulating fears that Hong Kong's fate might foreshadow Taiwan's own future under Chinese rule (Lai & Bernstein, 2020). In line with our theoretical framework, threat perception was triggered: Taiwanese felt deep outrage at the repression, while also seeing Hong Kong as a cautionary tale of what China's authoritarianism could mean for Taiwan's autonomy. As one interview put it, "the harsher the oppression China deployed against

the protesters in Hong Kong, the more support President Tsai gained" in Taiwan (Lai & Bernstein, 2020).

Interestingly, this Hong Kong effect cut across Taiwanese society but was somewhat mediated by partisan identity. Public opinion polls from mid-2019 through early 2020 show an overwhelming majority of Taiwanese approving of the Hong Kong protesters' cause. For example, nearly 80% of citizens characterized the Hong Kong demonstrations as a fight for democracy rather than a disruption of order, according to a national survey in early 2020 (Rich, 2020).

Figure 9 Partisan views of the Hong Kong protesters in Taiwan



However, supporters of the opposition KMT – traditionally more accommodating toward Beijing – were markedly less sympathetic: only about 50% of KMT partisans viewed Hong Kong's movement as pro-democracy, compared to 94% of DPP partisans who did. An earlier poll in December 2019 likewise found 89% of DPP identifiers but just 29% of KMT supporters saying they personally *"sympathize with the protesters in Hong Kong."* This partisan gap

underscores how the Hong Kong crisis sharpened the fundamental divide in Taiwanese politics: to DPP voters, Hong Kong's struggle vindicated a proud resistance to China, whereas some in the KMT camp were more ambivalent or inclined to downplay Hong Kong's significance. Still, even KMT leaders could not ignore the shifting public mood – by summer 2019, KMT candidates felt compelled to distance themselves from Beijing's 1C2S formula, with presidential nominee Han Kuo-yu famously vowing that 1C2S would happen in Taiwan "*over my dead body*" (Nachman 2019). In effect, Beijing's crackdown in Hong Kong pushed the entire Taiwanese political spectrum in a more anti-China direction, validating Hypothesis 3's expectation that foreign violence can ignite hostility among observers who were previously neutral.

2020: Backlash at the Ballot Box

By the time Taiwan's January 2020 national elections arrived, the political impact of the Hong Kong protests was unmistakable. President Tsai and the DPP, once given little chance, staged a stunning comeback. Tsai won re-election with a record-breaking 57% of the vote, a double-digit margin, while the DPP retained its legislative majority (Lai & Bernstein, 2020). This outcome represented a dramatic reversal from the DPP's drubbing in 2018, and observers linked it to the "Hong Kong factor." Voter turnout hit a historic high (75%), driven especially by young Taiwanese, under forty, who turned out in force to "protect Taiwan" and register their rejection of Beijing's 1C2S model. Surveys confirm that younger voters overwhelmingly favored Tsai's staunch anti-Beijing stance and were instrumental in the DPP's resurgence. Crucially, China's hard-liner behavior over 2019 – military posturing toward Taiwan and the televised repression in Hong Kong – had "significantly raised political awareness among the younger generations in Taiwan" and created a sense of *urgency* that rallied voters behind Tsai. DPP campaign messaging capitalized on this sense of threat: Tsai positioned the election as a

referendum on democracy vs. autocracy, often invoking Hong Kong's plight as a warning. In campaign rallies and debates, she and other pro-independence candidates repeatedly invoked "Today Hong Kong, Tomorrow Taiwan," pointedly asking voters to imagine Taiwan's fate if it acquiesced to Beijing. This framing resonated. As one expert noted, "the DPP platform clearly resonated with young adults and Taiwan's middle class, who showed their rejection of the 'one country, two systems' model" (Lai & Bernstein, 2020).

Meanwhile, the KMT's fortunes receded from their 2018 high-water mark. KMT candidate Han Kuo-yu, despite riding a populist wave, struggled to broaden his appeal beyond the deep-blue base. His credibility suffered from perceived China-friendly leanings – for instance, a well-publicized meeting with Hong Kong's Beijing-appointed liaison in March 2019 cast doubt on Han's ability to stand up to the PRC. As the Hong Kong protests intensified, many swing voters grew wary that Han and the KMT were "dangerously naïve" about Beijing (Rigger, 2020). The traditional KMT campaign line – that by accepting the 1992 Consensus Taiwan could maintain stable ties and economic benefits – now backfired. In 2020, against the backdrop of Hong Kong's turmoil, voters widely rejected the KMT's assurances that the PRC could be pacified through concessions. The DPP cleverly hammered this point: Tsai equated the KMT's cherished "1992 Consensus" with the discredited 1C2S formula, arguing that a vote for the KMT was effectively a vote to become the next Hong Kong (Rigger, 2020). This narrative proved potent. Even though Han Kuo-yu and other KMT figures tried to moderate their China rhetoric (all declaring 1C2S unacceptable, as noted above), the damage was done – the issue agenda had shifted squarely onto China, an unfavorable terrain for the KMT. Long-time Taiwan expert Shelley Rigger observed that the Hong Kong protests "upended the normal logic of Taiwan elections" by turning the cross-Strait question into a DPP advantage for the first time.

Traditionally, the KMT benefited when the China issue was front and center (as voters often feared the DPP would provoke Beijing), but in 2020 the roles were reversed: Tsai's confrontational stance toward Beijing was seen as the safer choice, while Han's promises of cross-Strait rapprochement rang hollow or even ominous (Rigger, 2020).

Figure 10 2018 Taiwanese Election

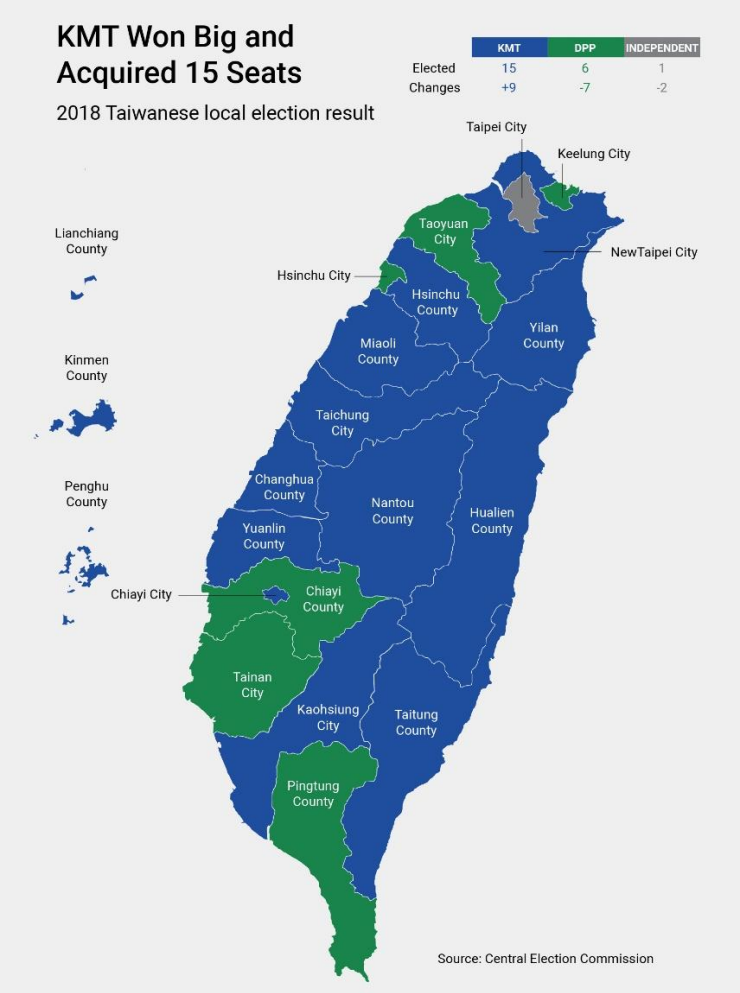
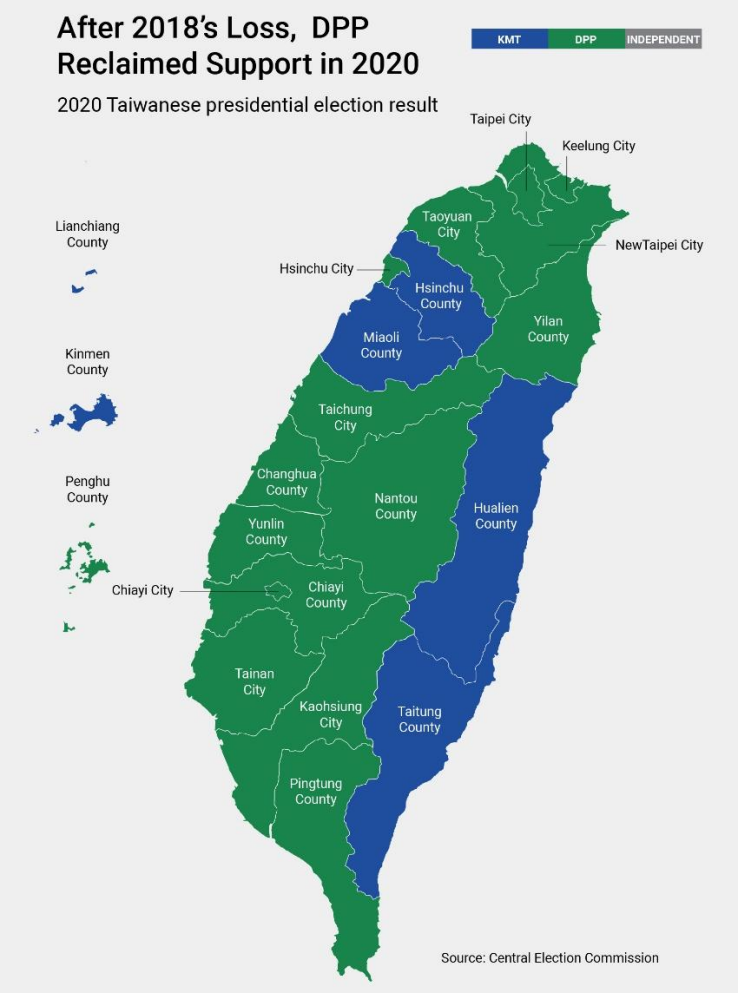


Figure 11 2020 Taiwanese Election



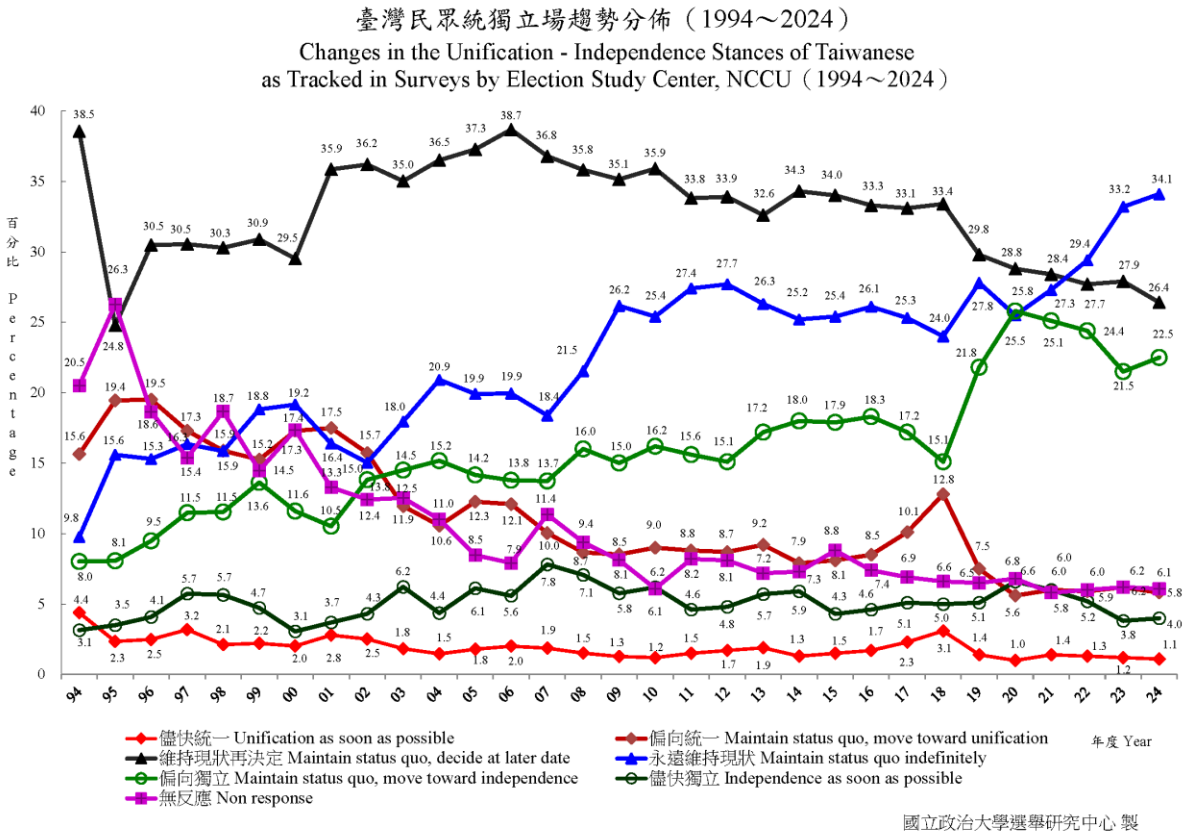
The electoral outcome reflected this anti-China wave. Not only did Tsai win handily, but the DPP also swept legislative districts in bastions like Kaohsiung – one year after that city had elected Han – signaling an across-the-board repudiation of the KMT's pro-China positioning. To be fair, domestic issues and candidate qualities still mattered (Tsai's campaign had also repaired some internal rifts and capitalized on Han's personal missteps). Yet few analysts doubted that Beijing's actions were a decisive factor. As one interview succinctly concluded, "China's hard-liner approach to Taiwan and the social unrest in Hong Kong are the two main factors that led to [Tsai's] landslide victory in the 2020 election." (Lai & Bernstein, 2020) Public opinion data supports this interpretation. Tsai's approval rating, which had sunk to ~24% in late 2018,

doubled to around 50% by August 2019, just two months into the Hong Kong protest wave. And in a January 2020 poll, 75% of Taiwanese respondents voiced opposition to the 1C2S formula, reflecting a sharp hardening of attitudes toward Beijing's unification agenda (up from an already high 50–60% range a few years earlier) (Nouwens, 2020). In short, anti-China sentiment surged to unprecedented levels as Taiwanese watched events in Hong Kong unfold.

Evidence from Taiwanese Polling and Search Data

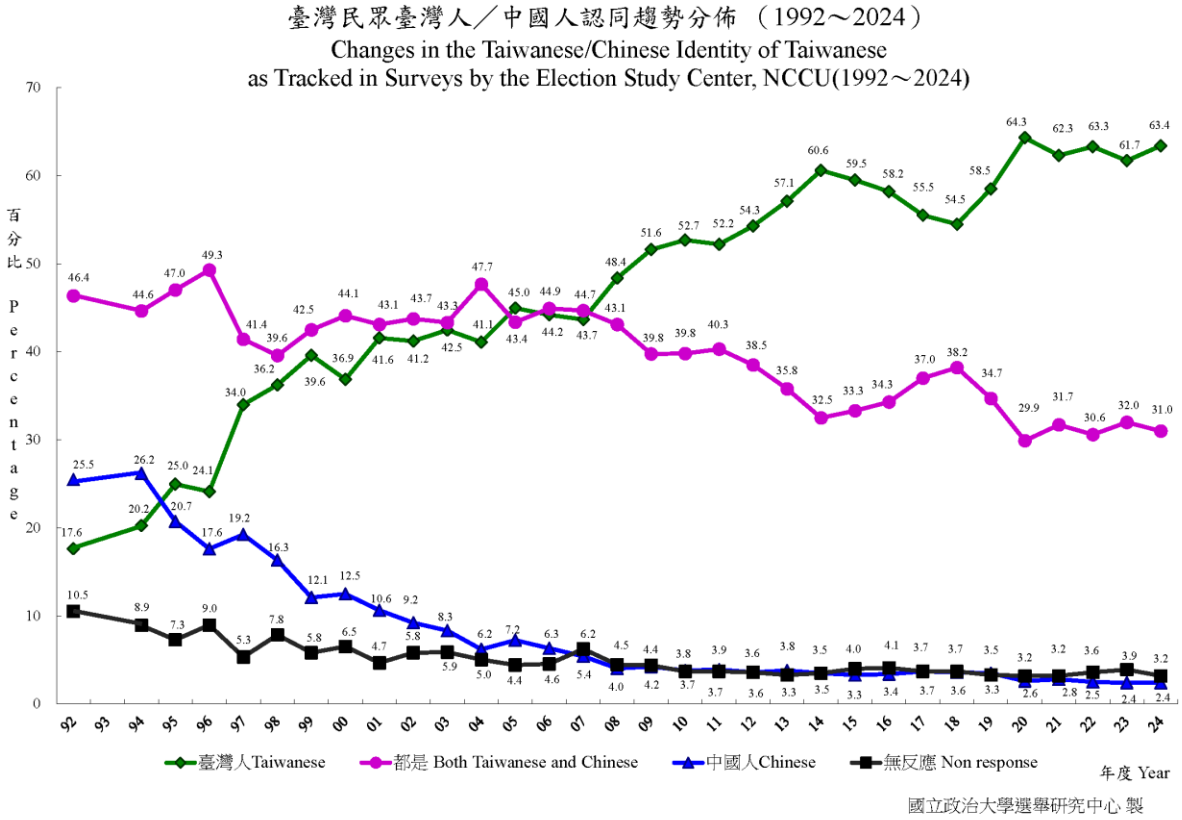
Multiple streams of empirical evidence illustrate how the Hong Kong protests shifted Taiwanese attitudes in line with Hypothesis 3. Public opinion polling from late 2019 onward recorded not only Tsai's rising personal approval but also a broader collapse in Taiwanese trust toward China.

Figure 12 NCCU Survey of Unification-Independence Stance of Taiwanese



We see that There is a clear upward tick in the inclinations towards independence (Green) and forever maintain status quo (blue) starting in the year of 2019, at the expense of "move towards independence" (Burgundy).

Figure 13 NCCU Surveys about Taiwanese/Chinese Identity

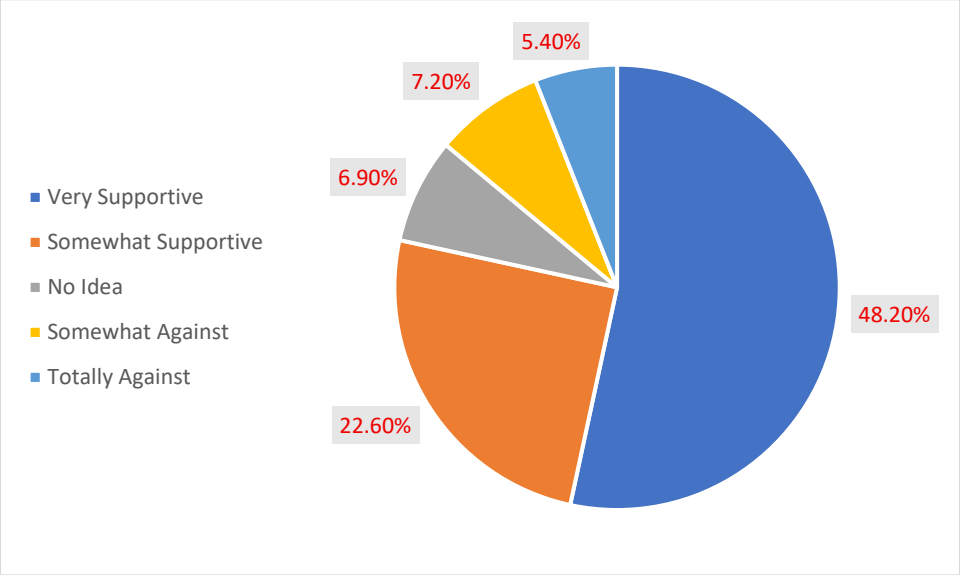


Similarly, we See a sizable jump in the Taiwanese/Chinese identity, the sole identification as being Taiwanese was on a slow decline prior to 2019 but began to tick up quickly for two years straight in 2019 and 2020. The expense comes mainly from the group that originally identified as both. Both trends together show a strong impact of the year 2019 and 2020 on the identity and inclination of the Taiwanese public, shifting away from engagement to hostility towards China. This is completely in line with the Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory that supports my hypothesis. Indeed, the violent events in Hong Kong,

definitively has propelled the High Empathy x High Fear Taiwanese to double down on its anti-China stance.

The NCCU surveys are great for longer term trend observations. Surveys by the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation (TPOF) were more of an immediate nature, showing sharp increases in the percentage of Taiwanese who view China unfavorably or as a threat after mid-2019 (a trend explored further in Section 3.5.2).

Figure 14 Taiwanese attitude towards the Hong Kong anti-extradition Bill Movement



The survey asked, "On June 9, Hong Kong witnessed its largest-ever anti-government protest movement, also known as the 'Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement' or 'Anti-ELAB Movement,' primarily opposing the Hong Kong SAR government's proposed amendments to the extradition law. Generally speaking, do you support or oppose this anti-government protest movement by the people of Hong Kong?"

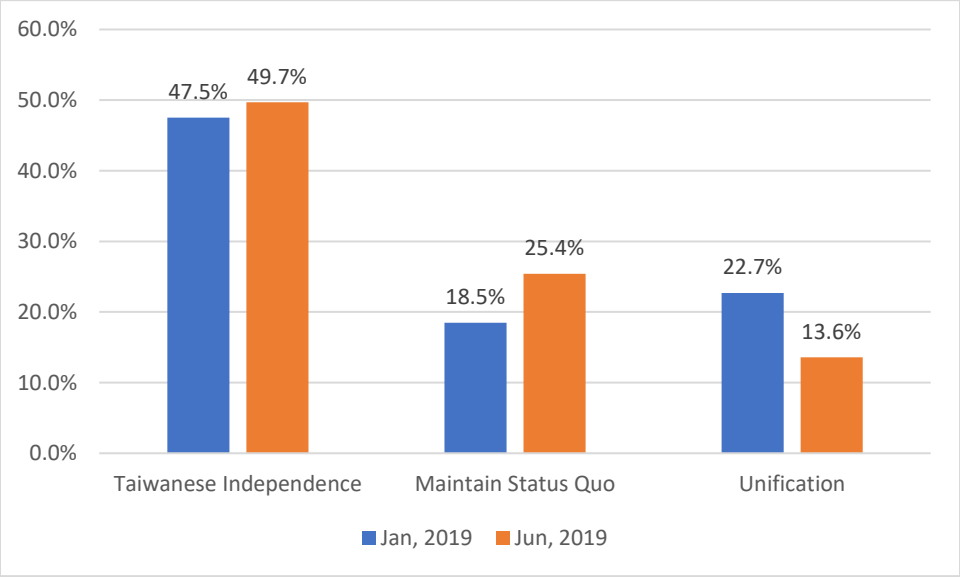
The results showed: 48.2% strongly supported it, 22.6% somewhat supported it, 7.2% somewhat opposed it, 5.4% strongly opposed it, and 6.9% had no opinion. In other words, among Taiwanese aged twenty and above, 71% basically supported Hong Kong's "Anti-ELAB

Movement," with as many as 48% expressing staunch support. Meanwhile, only 12.6% essentially opposed the movement, with only 5.4% strongly opposing it.

In simple terms, support for Hong Kong's "Anti-ELAB Movement" represents a broad consensus among Taiwanese people. This consensus strongly implies an even greater skepticism and opposition to the "One Country, Two Systems" framework.

An even clearer indication of Hong Kong's impact on the Taiwanese electoral shift comes from a comparison between January 2019 and June 2019, one after Xi's New Year Address that reiterated the 1C2S system and directly at the Taiwanese, and the other after the initial round of violence in Hong Kong.

Figure 15 Taiwanese independence/unification preference, comparison

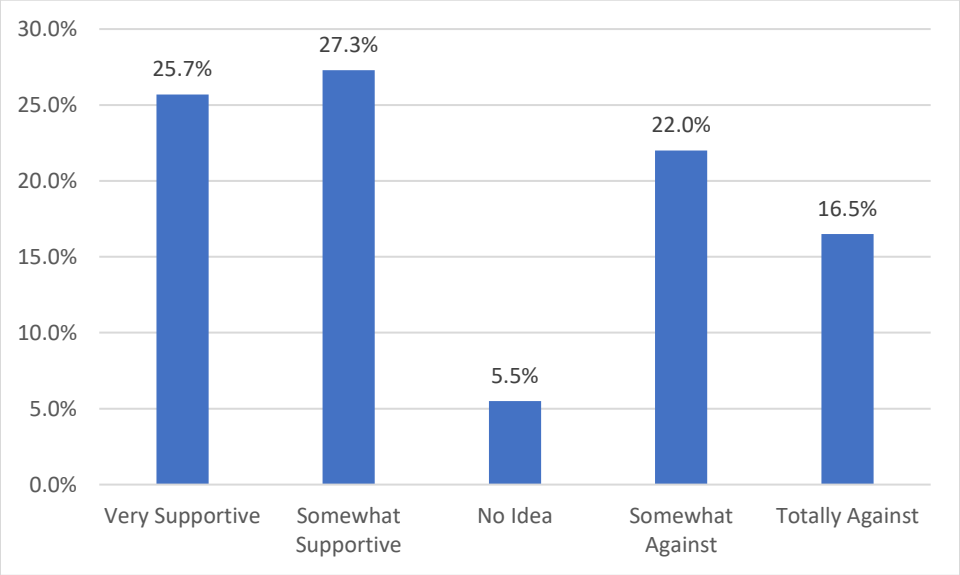


Indeed, there is a drop from people who supported unification drop from 22.7% in January after Xi's speech to 13.6% in June. While both pro-independence and pro status quo made gains.

In August, after the violent attack on protesters by gangs suspected of having ties to China and the SAR government, Taiwan continues to show solidarity with the protesters. This time TPOF's survey question asked, "In June, Hong Kong experienced the largest anti-

government mass movement in its history, also known as the 'Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement' or 'Anti-ELAB Movement,' which has continued for 11 weeks. (The movement primarily opposes the Hong Kong SAR government's proposed amendments to the extradition law and advocates for the freedom and democracy of Hong Kong people.) Some have said: 'When so many people in Hong Kong are striving hard for democracy and freedom, the Taiwanese government should step up and provide more support.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?"

Figure 16 Should Taiwanese Government Set Up and Provide More Support for Hong Kong Protesters?



Notice how the question changed from do you support the Hong Kong protesters to if they think the Taiwanese government should aid the protestors, going from perhaps moral and verbal support to actual support of tangible policies, a much higher commitment. Still more than half of the interviewees (25.7% strongly agree, 27.3% somewhat agree) favored more government support for protesters in Hong Kong, while 38.5% leaned towards disagreement (22.0% somewhat disagree and 16.5% strongly disagree) This suggests that the support for the protesters does not necessarily translate to an activist government policy response, however,

even with this reduction, Taiwanese public still largely favored more government intervention in response to the violence seen in Hong Kong, risking incurring potential backlash from China.

The partisan polling data cited above (DPP vs. KMT supporters' starkly different views of Hong Kong) reinforces the notion that those most identified with a pro-Taiwan (anti-China) stance became even more vehement, while even traditionally China-leaning constituencies were swayed to skepticism by Hong Kong's fate (Rich, 2020). Additionally, campaign discourse analysis reveals how thoroughly the Hong Kong issue permeated the 2020 race. One of the most popular political phrases in the 2020 election cycle was "亡國感" (Wang Guo Gan) and its homophone "芒果乾" (Mang Guo Gan), which translates to "Fear of National Demise", and the latter "Dried Mango". What does that mean? According to Tsai herself, "At this time, the people of Taiwan are indeed very concerned, primarily due to China's increasingly aggressive actions in recent years and its evident ambitions for regional expansion. Additionally, the unclear or even ambiguous stance of the Kuomintang and some other political parties toward China further contributes to this unease. The various events happening in Hong Kong right now have also intensified the anxiety among the Taiwanese public. This is not something deliberately manipulated by anyone." This was Tsai's response to accusations from KMT accusing her and the DPP of trying to manipulate fear among the people. Per Tsai herself, the fear and anxiety that Taiwan might cease to exist does not stem from economic or social reasons but is purely a fear from cross-strait relations and prompted by the events in Hong Kong. In the TPOF survey, about 22.5% would somewhat agree to the question that "If Tsai lost the 2020 election, Taiwan will be hopeless." However, only 15.6% would agree to the question (If Han, the KMT candidate, lost the 2020 election, Taiwan will be hopeless.)" We can see that Hong Kong played a pivotal rule in the rhetorics trying to utilize people's fear for Taiwan's own future in support of the DPP.

This suggests politicians were responding to – and further stoking – the public's hostile turn against Beijing. The salience of the protests – and the sense of shared identity and threat they engendered – laid the groundwork for the decisive electoral realignment that followed.

In sum, Taiwan's 2018–2020 electoral shift offers compelling evidence for Hypothesis 3. The violent repression of Hong Kong's democracy movement catalyzed a powerful third-party political mobilization in Taiwan, characterized by surging hostility toward China and its proxies. Taiwanese voters, especially the young, identified viscerally with Hong Kong's victims and drew direct lessons about the peril of Chinese authoritarianism, leading them to rally behind anti-China leaders at home. The DPP's resurgence and the KMT's decline were thus not random swings, but a direct response to foreign violence spilling across borders in the form of heightened threat perceptions. This case illustrates the dissertation's broader argument: when a democratic public witnesses grievous harm done to kindred others by an aggressor state, the result can be a rapid and consequential shift in domestic politics. Taiwan's experience – "saved" from a pro-Beijing drift by the cautionary drama in Hong Kong – epitomizes how empathy with victims and fear of the perpetrator combine to reshape political preferences. In the following sections, we will see that this pattern is not isolated to Taiwan, but is echoed in other contexts, affirming that the spillover of violence can engender significant hostility toward the offending regime and thereby transform third-party political landscapes.

3.5.2 Worsening Global Attitudes Toward China Amid the Hong Kong Protests (2019–2020)

The 2019–2020 Hong Kong pro-democracy protests coincided with a marked deterioration in international public opinion toward China. Building on the prior analysis of Taiwan's electoral shifts (Section 3.5.1), this section surveys how attitudes hardened across a range of democratic polities – each varying in their empathy for Hong Kong's cause and in their

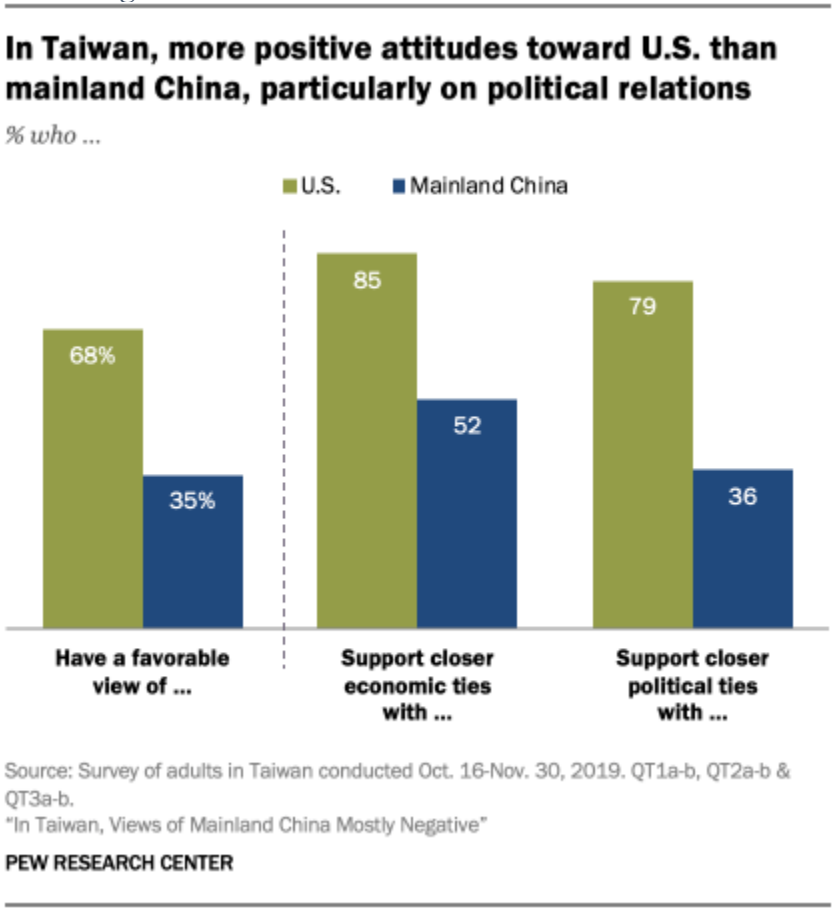
perception of threat from Beijing. Polls from reputable sources (Pew Research Center, Taiwan's Election Study Center and Public Opinion Foundation, Eurobarometer, etc.) reveal that after mid-2019, favorable views of China declined sharply in many regions, often reaching historic lows. In advanced democracies, unfavorable opinions became the clear majority by 2019 (Silver et al, 2019). Even in several developing democracies of the Global South, where China's image had previously been more positive, survey data suggest a downward trend in 2019–2020 (Asia Society, 2024). The Hong Kong unrest – widely broadcast as a struggle between democratic values and authoritarian repression – appears to have amplified existing concerns about China's behavior, whether through direct solidarity with Hong Kong (empathy) or through heightened wariness of Beijing's global ambitions (threat perception). We examine this attitudinal shift in three context categories: (1) High Empathy × High Threat (exemplified by Taiwan), (2) Mixed Typology (UK, US, Singapore, and Japan), (3) Low Empathy × Low Threat (Global South such as Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia). Each category experienced a worsening of public sentiment toward China around the time of the Hong Kong protests, albeit for distinct reasons and magnitudes, as detailed below.

High Empathy × High Threat (Solidarity Hawk): Taiwan

Just as the previous analysis of the electoral shift shows, Taiwanese public sentiment experienced a sizable shift. Taiwanese public opinion in late 2019 showed overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward the U.S. and markedly negative attitudes toward mainland China. Only 35% of people in Taiwan reported a favorable view of China, compared to 68% favorable toward the United States. Similarly, while 85% supported closer economic ties with the U.S., just 52% did so with China; and 79% supported closer political ties with Washington versus only 36%

with Beijing. These figures reflect the broad skepticism and distrust of China among Taiwanese, which intensified during the Hong Kong unrest.

Figure 17



Taiwan's public displayed profound sympathy with Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement while also feeling directly threatened by China's actions. Public opinion surveys consistently show that large majorities of Taiwanese reject Beijing's unification formula and grew even more distrustful of China during this period. Confidence in China's goodwill hit new lows. In March 2019 (even before the protests began), 79% of Taiwanese already disapproved of Beijing's "one country, two systems" proposal for unification, and 84% opposed any use of force against Taiwan (Chen, 2019). After witnessing China's hard-liner response in Hong Kong through late 2019, the appeal of one country, two systems essentially vanished from Taiwan's

perspective (Lai & Bernstein, 2020). A Mainland Affairs Council poll in mid-2020 found 89% of Taiwanese opposed applying "one country, two systems" to Taiwan – up from roughly four-fifths the year prior – and 81% were specifically alarmed by China's imposition of the new National Security Law in Hong Kong. Likewise, 75% of Taiwanese described Beijing as hostile and over 60% said China's approach to Taiwan was "unfriendly" (Taiwan News, Aug 7, 2020). These figures underscore how the Hong Kong crisis heightened both popular solidarity with Hong Kong and fears for Taiwan's own security.

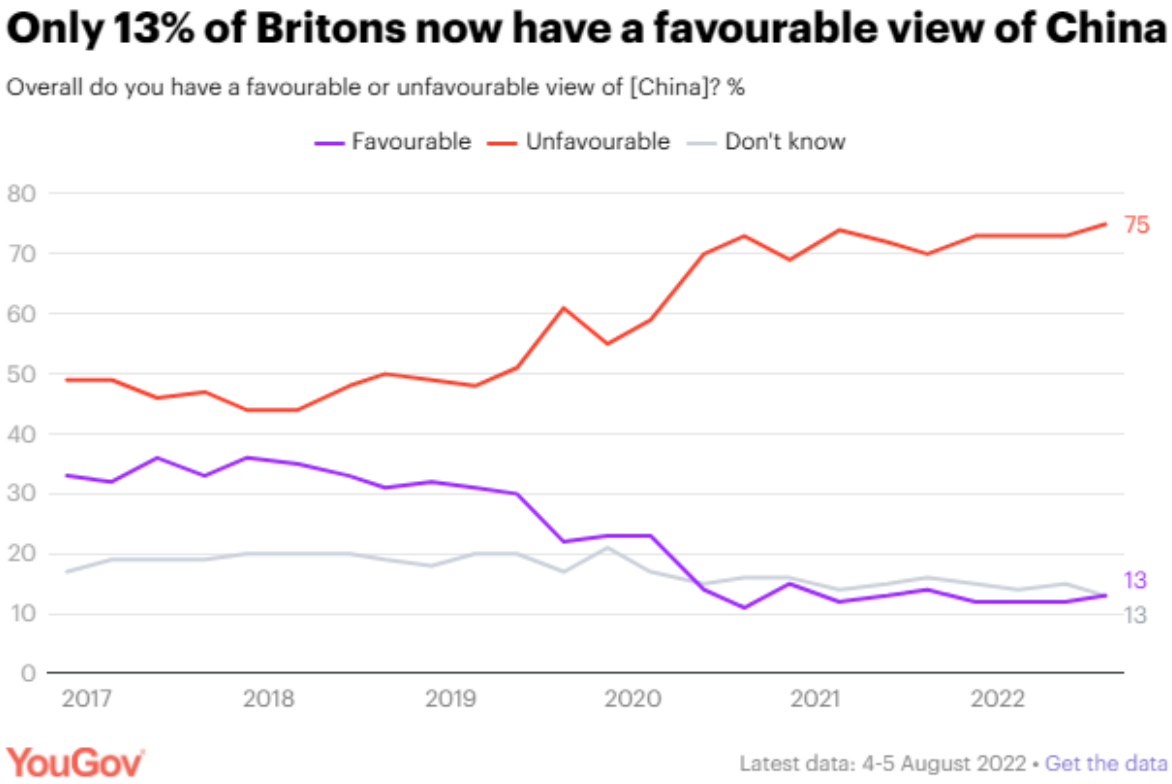
Crucially, the convergence of empathy and threat in Taiwan translated into tangible shifts in attitudes and behavior. Polling by the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation (TPOF) recorded surging approval for President Tsai's firm cross-Strait stance during 2019: by late 2019 to early 2020, over 70% of Taiwanese approved of Tsai's handling of China policy, a dramatic rebound from her slump after 2018 (TPOF, April 2024). In short, Taiwanese public opinion toward China, already wary, became even more negative as the Hong Kong protests unfolded. The events "significantly raised political awareness among the younger generations in Taiwan" and created a sense of urgency that China's repression in Hong Kong could someday threaten Taiwan's own autonomy (Lai & Bernstein, 2020). Empathy for Hong Kong's democratic plight and the perceived direct threat of Chinese annexation reinforced one another. By early 2020, virtually no one in Taiwan trusted Beijing's promises about "peaceful unification" under a Hong Kong-like model. This hardening of attitudes provided an essential backdrop for Taiwan's decisive electoral shift in favor of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), as documented in the previous section. In sum, Taiwan's case exemplifies how a high-empathy, high-threat context yielded some of the world's most negative public sentiments toward China amid the Hong Kong uprising.

Mixed Typology: United Kingdom and Singapore

Notably sympathetic reactions to Hong Kong's cause were also evident in places like the United Kingdom and Singapore, albeit in contexts where China poses a more distant or indirect threat. In these societies, the public largely empathized with Hong Kong's pro-democracy protesters due to historical or cultural affinities, while not perceiving China as an immediate danger to their own sovereignty. Nevertheless, even without a direct strategic threat, China's image suffered severe damage around 2019–2020 as the Hong Kong crisis unfolded.

In the United Kingdom, public opinion toward China took a sharp negative turn in the wake of both the Hong Kong crackdown and other issues (such as Xinjiang and the COVID-19 outbreak). The UK has a unique historical connection to Hong Kong, and many Britons felt a moral and legal obligation to support Hong Kongers' rights. Survey evidence shows widespread awareness in Britain of Beijing's erosions of Hong Kong's autonomy. A YouGov poll found that 58% of Britons had heard at least something about China's new national security law in Hong Kong in 2020 (Smith, 2022).

Figure 18 British View of China



From the same Yougov survey, it is also found that a majority of Britons support sanctions against China, but support wains with the prospect of rising prices. This is an understandable and telling distinction from the case of Taiwan, where the rebuke of China is strong enough to risk electing and supporting a more pro-independence party despite the raised risk of war, not to mention worsening of economic ties.

Other polls expressed disapproval of China's handling of the situation. Consequently, Britain's overall favorability toward China plummeted. Pew Global Attitudes data record that from 2018 to 2019, favorable opinions of China in the UK fell by 11 percentage points (from roughly 49% to 38% favorable) – one of the largest one-year drops in Europe – and by 2019 a solid majority of Britons viewed China unfavorably (Silver et al, 2019)[2]. This trend accelerated

[2] Also worth noting, Sweden has both the most negative and the largest drop in favorability towards China in 2019, yet it has little to do with Hong Kong. In 2019, China arrested and convicted a Swedish bookseller,

into 2020. By summer 2020, approximately three-quarters of the UK public held a negative view of China, an increase of nineteen points in unfavorable sentiment compared to a year earlier (Silver et al, 2020). Britons grew especially critical of China's human rights record and its breaches of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong. In a 2020 survey by the Central European Institute of Asian Studies, nearly 70% of UK respondents said their view of China had worsened over the past three years (Datt & Dunning,2022) – a period precisely coinciding with Hong Kong's upheaval and Beijing's hardline turn. By 2022, YouGov tracking showed only 13% of Britons held a favorable opinion of China, while 75% had an unfavorable view (Smith, 2022), a remarkable collapse from the mid-2010s when about one-third were favorable. Although other factors (like Britain's geopolitical realignment post-Brexit and the pandemic) also played roles, the Hong Kong protests clearly resonated with the British public's conscience. The UK government's decision to offer asylum and citizenship pathways to Hong Kong residents in 2020 enjoyed broad popular support, reflecting this empathetic stance. In summary, the UK exemplifies a high-empathy, low-threat case where anger over Hong Kong contributed to making China's image sharply more negative, even absent a direct security conflict.

Singapore presents a parallel yet nuanced scenario in Asia. Culturally and economically, Singapore is a majority-ethnic-Chinese city-state that might be expected to feel affinity with Hong Kong. Indeed, at the outset of Hong Kong's protests, surveys indicated staunch support among Singapore's citizens for the movement's goals. According to a June 2019 poll reported by

prompting widespread call across Sweden for his release. Chinese ambassador to Sweden also threatened Sweden stating that China would treat its enemies with shotguns." Sweden indicted its own ambassador to China for mishandling the case, and in the same year, rejected Huawei for its 5G network development. All these direct confrontations overshadowed any other events. Only two Western European nations had opinions of China improved, Italy and Greece, neither of which had particular ties with Hong Kong, nor any fear of China.

the South China Morning Post, about two-thirds to three-quarters of Singaporeans supported the Hong Kong protesters' cause (specifically opposing the proposed extradition law) (LA Times, 8/14/2019). This is striking given Singapore's strict laws against public protest at home – it suggests a high degree of empathy as Singaporeans watched Hong Kong people defending civil liberties that Singaporeans themselves mostly forgo. Anecdotally, Singaporean students and netizens expressed admiration for Hong Kong's youth activism, even wondering if they would do the same to protect their own rights (LA Times, 8/14/2019). However, the Singapore case also highlights the limits of this empathy and the complexity of threat perceptions. The Singaporean government took a cautious neutral line, emphasizing stability and warning that chaos in Hong Kong was in no one's interest. For the average Singaporean, China is not viewed as an existential threat – Beijing is a major trade partner and has no territorial dispute with Singapore. Thus, while sympathy for Hong Kong was high, it did not translate into widespread fear of China in the way it did for Taiwan or Japan. There is relatively little public polling on Singaporean attitudes toward China's government, which itself is telling. The lack of extensive polling attention suggests that China's image was not a deeply polarizing issue among the Singaporean public – an indirect indicator of limited salience or hostility on this matter. What evidence exists points to generally pragmatic views. Prior to 2019, surveys (e.g., by Pew or Asian Barometer) often showed Singaporeans holding relatively positive or neutral opinions of China compared to Western democracies. This remained largely intact through the Hong Kong protest period, apart from elite concerns about regional instability. Any change in Singapore's public sentiment was subtle: for example, some observers noted that as the Hong Kong protests dragged on and turned more violent by late 2019, Singaporean public sympathy began to waver, especially among older citizens who prioritize order over dissent (one survey claimed that 32% support of protesters and

17% support of government at the onset of the protests, but in October, only 19% support for protesters, and 32% support for government) (Jie, 2019). Overall, Singapore's experience in 2019–2020 can be characterized as high empathy for Hong Kong's plight but low perceived threat from China resulting in limited and nuanced change in hostility against China.

In other major powers, public opinion toward China worsened primarily due to perceptions of strategic threat, with relatively less personal identification with Hong Kong's struggle. The United States and Japan epitomize this low-empathy, high-threat category. Both publics were already inclined to view China as a rival or adversary, and their concerns were only reinforced by China's behavior in 2019–2020 (Hong Kong's repression being one of several flashpoints). Unlike in Taiwan, UK, or Singapore, ordinary Americans and Japanese did not necessarily empathize deeply with Hong Kong protesters on a cultural or emotional level; however, the events in Hong Kong still fed into their broader narrative of an assertive, authoritarian China that needed to be countered. The result was record-high negativity toward China in opinion surveys.

In the United States, views of China deteriorated dramatically over the period spanning the Hong Kong protests, though it is important to note the overlap with the U.S.–China trade war and the initial COVID-19 outbreak. By 2019, U.S. attitudes toward China had already turned sharply negative amid escalating strategic competition. Pew surveys in mid-2019 showed 60% of Americans holding an unfavorable opinion of China, the highest level recorded up to that point (Silver et al, 2019). This was a steep rise from just a year prior – for example, only 47% of Americans were unfavorable in 2018, so the Hong Kong unrest unfolded against a backdrop of rapidly hardening U.S. sentiment. The protests themselves garnered significant media coverage in the U.S. and earned bipartisan sympathy in Congress (which passed the Hong Kong Human

Rights and Democracy Act in late 2019). However, the American public's connection to Hong Kong was generally abstract; polls suggest Hong Kong was not a top-tier issue for most Americans compared to economic and security grievances with China (like job losses or military rivalry). Nonetheless, the symbolism of Beijing crushing freedoms in Hong Kong reinforced Americans' distrust. By spring 2020, as Hong Kong's autonomy was formally curtailed and COVID-19 spread globally, two-thirds of Americans (67%) expressed a negative view of China (Silver et al, 2020). Gallup's long-running trends show the same pattern: U.S. favorable opinions of China plunged from 53% in 2018 to 41% in 2019, then to an all-time low of 33% favorable in February 2020 (with 67% unfavorable) (Gallup, 2025). This collapse in U.S. favorability – from roughly half positive to only one-third positive in the span of two years – reflects the convergence of multiple factors, chief among them the perception of China as a growing threat to American interests and values. The Hong Kong crackdown amplified U.S. perceptions of a fundamental values clash: polling by Pew in mid-2020 found 73% of Americans had an unfavorable view of China, and a striking 42% chose the most extreme option of a *"very unfavorable"* view (Silver et al, 2020). Similarly, confidence in China's president Xi Jinping approached zero; by 2020 only about 20% of Americans had even "somewhat" confidence in Xi, while the vast majority did not trust him at all. These data points underscore how thoroughly negative the American public's image of China had become by the end of the Hong Kong protest period. It is true that empathy for Hong Kong's democracy was a secondary driver in the U.S. case – surveys indicate Americans were far more animated by fears of China's economic power, military buildup, and blame for the pandemic (Devlin et al, 2020). Yet, the timing of opinion shifts suggests Hong Kong was part of the broader mix: the visible "brutal use of the Hong Kong police" and China's blatant breach of its international promises to Hong Kong were cited by U.S.

political leaders and media as evidence of China's malign behavior. In sum, the American public's view of China in 2019–2020 reached historic negativity, driven by a high perceived threat with only limited direct empathy for Hong Kong, even as the Hong Kong saga reinforced the U.S. narrative of China as an oppressive adversary.

Turning to Japan, we see a similarly entrenched distrust of China that only deepened slightly further during this period. Japanese public opinion toward China has been overwhelmingly unfavorable for decades, due to longstanding historical animosities and security disputes (e.g., over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands). Thus, Japan entered 2019 with perhaps the world's most negative view of China, leaving arguably less room for a drastic shift. Even so, surveys register that Japanese sentiment about China remained at extreme lows in 2019 and 2020, with the Hong Kong crackdown serving to validate Japan's wariness of the Chinese Communist Party. In Pew's 2019 34-country survey, 85% of Japanese respondents reported an unfavorable opinion of China – the highest antipathy among all countries surveyed (Silver et al, 2019). Only around 14–17% of Japanese held a favorable view, essentially the mirror opposite of China's favorability in many developing countries. By 2020, Japan's unfavourability toward China was still hovering in the mid-80s percentagewise. In a 2020 Pew poll of advanced economies, 86% of Japanese voiced an unfavorable view of China, versus a mere 9% favorable. Moreover, virtually *no one in Japan expressed "a lot of confidence" in Xi Jinping* – one survey noted that fewer than 0.5% of Japanese had high confidence in China's leader (effectively zero, statistically) (Silver et al, 2020). These numbers highlight that Japan's public opinion was already maxed out on the negative end. The Hong Kong events likely reinforced negative perceptions without drastically changing the percentages. Qualitative indicators, however, show that Japanese observers closely followed the Hong Kong protests and drew lessons from them.

Japanese media gave substantial coverage to the protests, often with implicit comparisons to Taiwan's situation (Japan being an ardent supporter of Taiwan's democracy) and with reminders of the 1989 Tiananmen Square repression. The empathy factor in Japan was relatively low – average Japanese citizens did not necessarily identify with Hong Kong protesters in the way Taiwanese or Western audiences did, apart from a general solidarity as fellow democratic people. Instead, Hong Kong's fate was viewed through a realist lens: it demonstrated Beijing's untrustworthiness and the potential threat to East Asia's liberal order. Japanese defense white papers and political discourse explicitly cited China's Hong Kong National Security Law as evidence of China's authoritarian expansion, indirectly threatening regional stability (and by extension, Japan's security) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, March 20, 2024). Thus, while polls might show only a slight tick in Japan's already negative metrics (because they were already near saturation), the Hong Kong crackdown did contribute to Japan's rationale for strengthening its stance against China. In summary, both the U.S. and Japan experienced worsening attitudes toward China primarily rooted in threat perception. Hong Kong's lost freedoms became another data point in the case against China, rather than an emotional rallying cry, leading these publics – which started with low empathy – to double down on their distrust of Beijing.

Low Empathy × Low Threat: Global South (Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia)

The final category is the Global South – such as Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia – where public attitudes toward China also shifted amid the Hong Kong protests, though in more subdued ways. These countries are characterized here by relatively low empathy (the Hong Kong issue was distant and not deeply felt by the general public) and low perceived threat (China is not viewed as an immediate adversary; indeed, often it is seen as a partner or benign power). In such

contexts, we do not observe dramatic spikes of anti-China sentiment tied specifically to Hong Kong. Instead, any change in opinions was subtle and often intertwined with other contemporaneous events (like the COVID-19 pandemic). Moreover, the scarcity of frequent polling data itself speaks volumes: unlike in Western countries, polling organizations in Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia seldom asked the public about China or Hong Kong in 2019–2020, implying that these issues had relatively low salience for the average citizen (and minimal controversy to exploit in domestic politics).

Nevertheless, the data that are available suggest a mild downturn in China's image even in parts of the Global South during this period. Pew's global survey in 2019 (conducted before and during the early months of Hong Kong's protests) found that public opinion on China varied widely across developing democracies. In Brazil, for example, attitudes were quite mixed by age: 67% of younger Brazilians (ages 18–29) voiced a favorable opinion of China, whereas only 40% of Brazilians aged 50+ did (Silver et al, 2019). This generational gap indicates that while many Brazilians viewed China positively (especially youth attracted by trade and investment ties), a significant segment harbored wariness. The overall favorable share in Brazil around 2019 can be inferred to be roughly in the 50% range. There is evidence that this positivity eroded somewhat by 2020: the Asia Society's collation of polls notes that Latin America saw a more than ten-point average drop in China's net favorability from 2019 to 2020. While Hong Kong was not a prominent issue in Latin American media (the pollsters attribute the drop to the outbreak of Covid), China's handling of the protests may have marginally contributed to concerns about its commitment to international norms. More salient, however, was the emerging narrative of China as a source of a global pandemic in early 2020, which likely accelerated any negative turn (Asia Society, 2024). In South Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa more broadly, China historically enjoys

a fairly positive public image thanks to its investment and diplomatic outreach. Afrobarometer surveys throughout the 2010s consistently show majorities in many African countries (Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, etc.) rating China's influence as "somewhat" or "very" positive for their country. For instance, as of the late 2010s, around 70% of Nigerians held a favorable view of China (Silver et al, 2019). South Africa, as a BRICS partner of China, has also had more positive than negative leanings in public opinion, though tempered by concerns about jobs and loans. During 2019–2020, there was scant direct polling in South Africa about Hong Kong or Chinese politics, reflecting low public engagement with those topics. The lack of polling attention can be interpreted as indirect evidence that third-party conflicts involving China (like Hong Kong) did not ignite widespread public backlash in South Africa. Any shift in South African views of China likely centered on practical issues (economic conditions, 5G technology debates, etc.) rather than Hong Kong. Indeed, Asia Society's data suggest that Africa's perceptions of China stayed relatively unaffected by the tumult of 2019–20, and in some African countries China's image even improved slightly during that time – possibly due to Chinese COVID aid or simply continuity of generally favorable views (Asia Society, 2024). By 2020, China engaged in active "mask diplomacy" and vaccine outreach in Southeast Asia, which might have stabilized or even slightly improved China's image in Indonesia. Indeed, the Asia Society analysis notes that Southeast Asia was one region where China's favorability did not collapse in 2020 and may have even ticked upward, distinguishing it from the West and South Asia.

Overall, in the Global South, the Hong Kong protests did not become a focal point of public opinion in the way they did in many Western countries or in East Asia. Polling data on China around 2019–2020 is sparse, which in itself suggests that public hostility toward China remained limited – had anti-China sentiment been a potent political issue, we would expect more

polls and media attention measuring it. Instead, attitudes in these countries were shaped by a complex mix of pragmatic considerations and distant perceptions. This stands in contrast to the sharp opinion backlashes observed in high-empathy or high-threat contexts discussed earlier.

In conclusion, the Hong Kong protests of 2019–2020 served as a significant inflection point for China's global image. Across a diverse set of democratic regions, reputable polling data consistently show a trend toward more negative attitudes toward China, though the magnitude and motivations for this shift varied. Taiwan's populace combined deep emotional solidarity with Hong Kong and acute fear of Beijing's threat to produce an overwhelming repudiation of China's overtures. In the mixed typographic groups, various states such as U.K., U.S., Japan, and Singapore all had moderate reactions that treaded carefully. And in the Global South democracies, public opinion moved more subtly, reflecting low engagement with the issue and relatively low stakes. Taken together, these surveys and trends illustrate how the turmoil in Hong Kong became a worldwide PR debacle for Beijing. By undermining Hong Kong's freedoms, China not only alienated the people of Hong Kong, but also damaged its standing in the court of international public opinion – reinforcing perceptions of China as an authoritarian and untrustworthy power across many parts of the globe. The attitudinal changes documented here (in section 3.5.2) complement the political developments discussed earlier (section 3.5.1 on Taiwan), underlining a key conclusion: the Hong Kong crisis significantly shifted perceptions of China's regime for the worse, both within its near-abroad and among distant democracies, at a critical juncture in China's relations with the world.

3.6 Global Responses to China's Repression of Uyghurs

3.6.1 Background

China's mass repression of the Uyghur population in Xinjiang – involving the internment of an estimated 1–2 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in "re-education" camps since 2017 – has elicited sharply divergent reactions around the world. A key explanatory framework is the interplay of empathetic identification with the Uyghurs and perceived threat from China. Broadly, democratic societies and other observers have responded more forcefully when they both sympathize with Uyghurs as victims and view China as a strategic or ideological threat. Conversely, where empathy or threat perception is low, responses have been muted or even nonexistent. This section analyzes global reactions through this lens, drawing on opinion polls and elite discourse, and concrete policy measures (sanctions, asylum, condemnations, UN motions) in the post-2017 period.

3.6.2 Incomplete Quadrant, Missing Champion

Unlike the global reaction to the Hong Kong protests, which had a clear champion in Taiwan—possessing both high empathetic solidarity with protesters and a significant existential threat perception from China—the Uyghur crisis distinctly lacks such a champion. The perpetrator in both cases is identical: China, whose authoritarian policies have drawn consistent criticism. Moreover, both victim groups, Hong Kong protesters and Uyghur minorities, share elements of victimhood under oppressive measures from Beijing. However, differences in third-party observers' identification and threat perception have produced starkly different international impacts.

In Taiwan's case, cultural and democratic solidarity with Hong Kong was amplified by fears that Taiwan itself could be targeted next. This dual empathy-threat dynamic mobilized

Taiwanese society dramatically, elevating Hong Kong's plight into a central domestic and international issue, influencing elections, public discourse, and foreign policy.

Conversely, no equivalent third-party observer has emerged regarding Xinjiang. Countries demonstrating empathy based on religious or cultural affinities—such as Turkey and Indonesia—face significant economic and strategic restraints, preventing sustained advocacy. Those perceiving China primarily as a geopolitical threat, including the United States, India, and Japan, have framed Uyghur oppression primarily through the lens of broader strategic rivalry, limiting the depth of empathetic mobilization and emotional resonance.

The absence of a unified state or entity experiencing both high empathy with Uyghurs and substantial threat perception from China explains why international responses, despite widespread acknowledgment, remain fragmented and inconsistent. This fragmentation contrasts sharply with the comprehensive and impactful response elicited by the Hong Kong protests in Taiwan, underscoring that third-party observers' characteristics—particularly the confluence of empathy and threat—critically shape the scale and intensity of global reactions.

Mixed Typologies: One-Dimensional Drivers of Moderate Response

Table 8 Responses regarding Uyghur Repression

State	Empathy	Threat	Response
Turkey	High	Low	Asylum, Rhetoric, Condemnation
Indonesia	Moderate	Moderate	Strong public, moderate official
Kazakhstan	High (public)	Low	Limited, quiet diplomacy
India	Low	High	Moderate, indirect critique
Saudi Arabia	Low	Low	None, supportive of China

Turkey's Response: Turkey has deep cultural ties to the Uyghurs, who are a Turkic Muslim people; empathy among Turks for their "Uyghur brothers" runs high. Even before the current crisis, Turkey offered sanctuary to Uyghur exiles and loudly criticized China's treatment of them. In 2009, following unrest in Xinjiang, then-PM (now President) Erdoğan famously

decried Chinese abuses as “genocide” (Gürer, 2022). As reports of mass internment emerged after 2017, Ankara initially responded with strong public condemnation. In February 2019, the Turkish Foreign Ministry blasted China’s “systematic assimilation” of Uyghur Turks as “a great embarrassment for humanity,” citing “torture and political brainwashing in concentration camps” and urging the UN to take action. This was one of the fiercest rebukes China received from any Muslim-majority country. The Turkish public’s outrage was further stoked by news of a prominent Uyghur musician’s death in custody, which Ankara said “strengthened [the] public’s reaction” to China’s abuses (The Guardian, Feb 9, 2019). Consistent with this empathy, opinion polls in Turkey show disapproval of Beijing’s policies – a 2021 survey found 53.2% of Turks felt their government’s response to Uyghur treatment was too weak, pressuring leaders to do more (Gürer, 2022). Indeed, Turkish officials have at times echoed public sentiment by issuing statements “decrying China’s arbitrary arrests, physical assaults and political brainwashing” of Uyghurs. Concrete actions have included allowing tens of thousands of Uyghur refugees to reside in Turkey and refraining (so far) from ratifying a 2017 China–Turkey extradition treaty that Uyghurs fear (Gürer, 2022). Turkish cities have seen frequent Uyghur solidarity rallies. For instance, when China’s foreign minister visited in 2021, hundreds of Uyghurs in Turkey protested in Ankara and Istanbul, demanding Ankara take a tougher stand (LA Times, 3/25/2021). Turkey’s response, however, is tempered by threat calculations: Ankara is increasingly reliant on Chinese investment and vaccine aid, which Beijing has leveraged to muffle Turkey’s outspokenness. Notably, after 2019 Turkey grew more cautious – Chinese officials warned that Turkish criticism “would inevitably undermine bilateral ties” and even delayed COVID-19 vaccine shipments to pressure Turkey into silencing Uyghur activism and approving the extradition pact (Gürer, 2022). President Erdoğan’s government, facing economic

strain, has largely refrained from further high-level condemnations since 2020, seeking not to provoke a powerful trading partner. Still, the issue remains a diplomatic sore point: Turkish opposition figures accuse Erdoğan of "hush money" deals with China to stay silent, and the nationalist base (usually pro-government) has expressed disappointment over the perceived abandonment of Uyghurs (Gürer, 2022). In sum, Turkey illustrates a high-empathy society pushing for a strong response, partially checked by the state's pragmatic fear of Chinese retaliation. The net result has been strong rhetorical and humanitarian support for Uyghurs (sanctuary and denunciations) but limited official sanctions or multilateral initiatives against China.

Indonesia's Response: In Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, empathy for Uyghurs is driven by religious solidarity. Although Indonesians are ethnically unrelated to Uyghurs, the idea of a Muslim minority oppressed by a Communist state has struck a chord among Islamic civil society. Public interest in the Uyghur issue surged in late 2018 and 2019 as international media exposed the Xinjiang camps. News coverage in Indonesia spiked accordingly, and major Islamic organizations and activists began speaking out (Human Rights Watch, 2020). This culminated in a series of large street protests. In December 2018, hundreds of Indonesians rallied outside China's Jakarta embassy, chanting for Muslim solidarity and urging the UN and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to condemn Beijing (Reuters, 2018). Even larger demonstrations followed a year later: in December 2019, thousands protested in Jakarta and other cities, with banners reading "China, stop the genocide of Uyghurs" and calls to boycott Chinese goods (Radio Free Asia, Dec 27,2019). Influential Muslim groups (Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama) initially hesitated – some leaders were taken on staged visits to Xinjiang and came back echoing Chinese narratives, a fact later exposed by investigative

media (Human Rights Watch, 2020). However, facing criticism, these organizations eventually issued a strongly worded joint statement demanding China "stop all violations of human rights especially against the Uyghur community, under whatever pretext." Elite discourse thus shifted toward open concern by early 2020. Importantly, Indonesian authorities did take a few concrete steps under public pressure: the Foreign Ministry summoned China's ambassador in late 2018 to convey "concern from various parties in Indonesia" about Uyghurs and to urge respect for religious freedom (Reuters, Dec 21, 2018). Despite such gestures, Indonesia's official response remained cautious and framed in terms of neutrality. The government has insisted publicly that Xinjiang is an "internal matter" for China, and it pointedly refused to support Western-led human rights resolutions. In October 2022, Indonesia voted against even holding a UN Human Rights Council debate on Xinjiang, with officials arguing they did not want the Council used for "political rivalry" (Radio Free Asia, Oct 7, 2022). This stance drew domestic criticism for "remaining silent" in the face of Muslim suffering. Indonesian diplomats defend it by citing the principle of non-interference (and likely due to perceived economic and diplomatic risks of angering Beijing). In short, empathy in Indonesian society is high – as evidenced by mass protests and support for Uyghur causes – but the state's threat perception and strategic calculus vis-à-vis China (a major investor and trade partner) have kept official actions moderate. The strongest responses have been bottom-up: public demonstrations, vocal Islamist opposition figures, and media exposés. The government's top-down actions were mostly limited to quiet diplomacy (private "concerns" conveyed) and humanitarian openness (allowing Uyghur asylum-seekers transit, as Malaysia did), rather than sanctions or formal condemnations.

Kazakhstan (High Empathy, Low Threat): Kazakhstan shares a border with Xinjiang and is home to ethnic Kazakh minorities who also fell victim to China's camps. This gave

Kazakhstan a unique empathetic stake – many Kazakh citizens had relatives across the border in Xinjiang, and reports emerged that ethnic Kazakhs (and Kyrgyz) were detained alongside Uyghurs (Svoboda, 2021). Throughout 2018–2019, Kazakh civil society (albeit limited under an authoritarian system) became an epicenter of activism: brave individuals like Sayragul Sauytbay, an ethnic Kazakh teacher who fled Xinjiang, spoke publicly about the atrocities. Groups of families protested for the release of detained kin, gathering in front of the Chinese consulate in Almaty – sometimes for months on end (Civic Idea, Oct 1, 2023). These appeals forced the Kazakh government into a delicate position. On one hand, the public empathy and moral pressure to help Turkic Muslim "compatriots" was high; on the other, Kazakhstan is economically dependent on China (a key Belt & Road investor) and does not see China as a military threat, so its leaders were loath to jeopardize relations. The result was a muted official response, punctuated by quiet interventions: in 2018 Kazakhstan's government quietly negotiated the release of some 12 Kazakh citizens from Xinjiang camps – a rare instance of diplomatic pressure on Beijing (Svoboda, 2021). Officials also allowed a trickle of ethnic Kazakh refugees to settle or pass through (often under the radar). However, no public condemnations were issued; state media in Kazakhstan largely avoided the Uyghur topic under Chinese pressure. By 2019, Kazakhstan had tilted toward openly supporting China's stance – China thanked Kazakhstan for its "understanding and support" regarding Xinjiang (Svoboda, 2021). In summary, Kazakhstan's empathy (rooted in ethnic kinship and shared religion) led to some humanitarian gestures and domestic debate, but the lack of a threat perception (indeed, China is seen more as benefactor than aggressor) meant no robust response toward China. The government prioritized strategic ties over moral outrage, resulting in a moderate and largely

behind-the-scenes reaction despite considerable public sympathy for Uyghurs and Kazakhs in Xinjiang.

The cases above represent broader categories of global responses. For instance, Malaysia closely parallels Indonesia's response, while Kazakhstan's cautious position mirrors other Central Asian states' situations. Likewise, the United States, Japan, and Western democracies generally occupy positions characterized by limited direct empathy toward the Muslim Uyghur minority but significant perceived threat from China. Similar to the Hong Kong protests, these democracies display moderate levels of empathy, grounded in shared liberal-democratic values and a general outrage toward human rights abuses, alongside strong perceptions of China as a systemic rival or security concern, although typically not an immediate military threat.

Furthermore, as observed in the Hong Kong case, states in the Global South and Muslim-majority countries without direct ethnic ties to the Uyghurs have shown limited or negligible reactions. Notably, affluent Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have actively supported China's Xinjiang policies. For example, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman explicitly supported China's actions in 2019, framing them as legitimate counter-terrorism efforts necessary for national security.

This comparative analysis reveals a significant pattern: democratic states respond robustly to foreign atrocities when both empathetic identification and strategic interests converge. Absent these dual factors, even severe abuses may fail to trigger meaningful responses. Empathy, whether through cultural affinity, religious solidarity, or shared democratic ideals, significantly elevates public awareness and political action concerning distant crises. Concurrently, strategic threat perceptions, encompassing military, economic, or ideological

dimensions, provide states with strong incentives to act assertively, as demonstrated in the U.S.–China rivalry and Taiwan's heightened alertness to China's actions in Hong Kong.

Ultimately, when empathy and threat align, political will and international advocacy reach their peak, fostering sustained, forceful responses. The absence of either element leads to fragmented or muted reactions, underscoring the critical role these dual perceptions play in shaping international responses to human rights crises.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter systematically examined the empirical validity of the Theory of Violence Spillover and Third-Party Response, focusing on third-party reactions to China's repression of the 2019–2020 Hong Kong protests and the repression of Uyghurs in roughly the same time period. Across Hypotheses 1–3, evidence robustly demonstrates how democratic observers' responses are significantly shaped by the interplay of empathetic identification with victim groups and perceived threats from perpetrating states.

Regarding Hypothesis 1 (Heightened Interest) in Hong Kong, Taiwan emerged prominently due to its unique combination of deep empathy toward Hong Kong's protesters and acute existential threat perception from China. Cross-national and subnational analyses of Google Trends data showed that countries with either strong empathy or high perceived threat—but not both—exhibited moderate or symbolic levels of interest. In contrast, states with low empathy and low threat, particularly in the global South, demonstrated minimal engagement, highlighting the necessity of both empathy and threat for substantial mobilization. Subnational data further confirmed that cosmopolitan urban centers, regions with substantial expatriate communities, and areas geographically closer to Hong Kong consistently showed elevated public interest. While in the case of Xinjiang, the impact on some mixed typology group members can

be observed, but most nations fall under the peripheral onlooker category and have no spikes of interest.

Hypothesis 2 (Support for Victims) found substantial support through democratic states' bilateral interactions and policy responses. In the Hong Kong case, the Solidarity Hawk of Taiwan again demonstrated a strong response, implementing specific measures such as special visa programs for Hong Kong refugees, consistent official statements of solidarity, and widespread civic mobilization. Comparatively, states with high empathy or high threat alone, such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Japan, adopted limited, careful actions primarily consisting of rhetorical support and selective policy initiatives. Conversely, countries with low empathy and low threat, predominantly in the global South, either abstained from meaningful engagement or aligned explicitly with China's position, further underscoring the theory's robustness. In the case of Xinjiang, mixed typology the Non-committal Hedgers like Turkey, Indonesia, and some western states showed limited actual action in support of the victims. While most states in the world paid little attention to the suffering victims.

Hypothesis 3 (Hostility toward China) was strongly supported by Taiwan’s dramatic electoral shifts from 2018 to 2020 in the Hong Kong case. Initially, cross-Strait tensions were secondary to domestic concerns, favoring the China-friendly Kuomintang (KMT). However, the Hong Kong protests significantly reshaped Taiwanese public opinion, increasing hostility toward China and catalyzing an electoral shift towards the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), framing the election as an existential referendum on Taiwan’s democratic survival. Polling data clearly reflects this marked rise in anti-China sentiment, underpinning the decisive electoral reversal and rapidly deteriorating public favorability towards China. And in the non-committal hedgers, there

is also a measurable decline in China's image. Similarly in Xinjiang, mixed-typology groups showed a worsening view, but none that really stand out as the solidarity hawk like Taiwan.

Ultimately, the Hong Kong and Uyghur cases collectively reinforce the explanatory strength of the Theory of Violence Spillover and Third-Party Response. They illustrate the essential conditions—empathetic solidarity and credible threat perception—under which foreign violence resonates most deeply within democratic societies, reshaping political landscapes, influencing electoral outcomes, and prompting concrete policy actions in response to observed foreign repression.

4. Third-Party Responses to Russian Aggression (2008–2022)

4.1 Introduction and Analytical Framework

This chapter examines how third-party states responded to major instances of Russian military aggression between 2008 and 2022. It focuses on three key events – the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, the 2014 annexation of Crimea (along with the war in Eastern Ukraine), and the full-scale 2022 invasion of Ukraine – and analyzes why international reactions varied across these cases. Third-party responses are analyzed through the dissertation's theoretical lens emphasizing empathy (identification with victims) and threat (perceived danger from the aggressor) as primary drivers of foreign public opinion and policy shifts. Broadly, the intensity of Western and democratic states' reactions to Russian aggression increased over time, corresponding with growing empathetic solidarity with victimized countries and heightened threat perceptions of Russia. In 2008, foreign responses were relatively muted; by 2022, Russia's actions provoked unprecedented unity, sanctions, and support for Ukraine, reflecting a dramatic shift in perceived stakes. The following sections provide an overview of each conflict and then outline how empathy and threat form the analytical framework to explain these third-party responses.

4.1.1 Overview of Russian Aggression: Georgia, Crimea, and Ukraine

Russia's 2008 war in Georgia (August 7–12, 2008) was a short but pivotal conflict. Following escalating tensions and clashes in Georgia's breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russian forces intervened decisively, defeating the Georgian military in a matter of days. Moscow then unilaterally recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, effectively seizing portions of Georgian territory. The international reaction to Russia's invasion of Georgia was widely seen as weak. Western democracies condemned the violation of

Georgia's sovereignty but took no concrete punitive action beyond diplomacy. The European Union quickly brokered a ceasefire (led by French President Nicolas Sarkozy) that largely reflected Russian terms, and the United States under the new Obama administration sought a "reset" with Moscow shortly thereafter. This accommodating approach meant Moscow faced few lasting consequences for the war. Many in Russia perceived the West's muted response as a tacit green light for future aggression (Dickinson, 2021). I argue that the weak response can be attributed to the ambiguity of victimhood in the situation, as it is widely reported that both sides violated human rights, and there are genuine concerns for the safety of the secessionist movement. In retrospect, the 2008 Georgia war is often regarded as a turning point marking the end of the post-Soviet cooperative era and the beginning of a more confrontational dynamic between Russia and the West. It foreshadowed conflicts to come in Ukraine.

Russia's 2014 intervention in Ukraine represented a major escalation. In February–March 2014, following Ukraine's pro-democracy Euromaidan revolution and the ouster of President Yanukovych, Russian troops without insignia ("little green men") occupied Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014 after a hastily organized referendum, marking the first forcible annexation of European territory since World War II. Moscow also fomented and armed a separatist insurgency in Eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk), sparking an extended war in the Donbas region. The annexation of Crimea was met with widespread international condemnation and significantly stronger third-party reactions than in 2008. The United States and European Union responded by enacting coordinated sanctions against Russia and calling for an immediate withdrawal from Ukrainian territory (European Commission, 2025). Russia was suspended from the G8, reverting the forum back to the G7 as Western leaders sought to diplomatically isolate Putin's government. Over the subsequent months, NATO

stepped up its military presence in Eastern Europe, and EU/US sanctions were gradually intensified – especially after July 2014, when Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine by a Russian-supplied missile, an event that galvanized tougher action (Dickinson, 2021). Still, the 2014 responses, while significant (travel bans, asset freezes, and some sectoral sanctions), remained limited to economic and diplomatic tools; direct military intervention was off the table. The conflict in Donbas smoldered on for years (2014–2021), resulting in over 13,000 deaths by UN estimates (Radio Free Europe, 2019). In summary, the 2014 Crimea crisis drew a much sharper rebuke from the democratic international community than the 2008 Georgia war had, but it did not resolve the conflict, nor did it deter Russia's ambitions in the long run.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 triggered an unprecedented wave of third-party reactions across the globe. On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a massive, multi-front attack on Ukraine – the largest military assault in Europe since 1945. This blatant aggression against a sovereign democracy shocked and galvanized world opinion. Empathy for Ukraine's plight and outrage at Russia's actions surged in many countries, especially in Europe and North America, driven by extensive media coverage of Ukrainian suffering and President Zelenskyy's appeals. At the same time, threat perception spiked dramatically: NATO's eastern members (e.g., Poland, Baltic states) feared they could be next, and even distant democracies saw Russia's war as a grave challenge to the international order and their own security. As a result, the response to the 2022 invasion was far more unified and robust than in the earlier episodes. A United Nations General Assembly emergency session voted 141–5 to condemn Russia's invasion and demand withdrawal – a remarkably lopsided global rebuke (Reuters, 03/02/2022). Western powers moved within days to impose severe sanctions on Russia, targeting its central bank, major

industries, and oligarchs; these measures went well beyond those of 2014, cutting Russia off from global financial networks and markets on an unprecedented scale (European Commission, 2025). Dozens of countries (NATO and others) began supplying Ukraine with substantial military aid, including advanced weapons, intelligence, and training, marking a notable shift from the caution of 2014. NATO rapidly reinforced its eastern flank with troops and accepted new membership applications from Finland and Sweden, reflecting an acute security awakening in Europe. Meanwhile, public opinion in many democracies swung firmly behind Ukraine – large protests in support of Ukraine took place in cities worldwide, and populations accepted economic sacrifices (such as higher energy prices) as governments enacted Russia sanctions. In sum, Russia's 2022 aggression elicited an overwhelming third-party backlash: a combination of diplomatic isolation, economic punishment, military assistance to Ukraine, and renewed unity of Western alliance's not seen since the Cold War. This dramatic escalation in response can be linked to the higher levels of empathic identification and threat perception evoked by the 2022 war compared to the conflicts in 2008 and 2014.

4.2 Case 1 – The 2008 Russo-Georgian War

4.2.1 Conditions for Strong Third-Party Reactions

4.2.1.1 Shared Historical Legacies and Regional Solidarity

Prior to the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, empathetic identification with Georgia varied significantly among third-party states, shaped strongly by historical, regional, and cultural bonds. Countries in Eastern Europe, the post-Soviet space, and particularly those in the Caucasus region, exhibited elevated levels of solidarity due to shared historical experiences under Soviet domination and subsequent struggles for independence. For these countries, Georgia's precarious relationship with Russia was not merely a foreign concern; rather, it resonated deeply with their

own historical narratives of oppression, occupation, and independence struggles. Countries such as Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and particularly Ukraine viewed Georgia's political trajectory and independence ambitions as reflective of their own post-Soviet paths. These nations closely identified with Georgia's struggles due to historical analogies—such as the Soviet invasions of Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and the annexation of the Baltic states (1940). The historical experiences ingrained a sense of empathetic solidarity based on shared victimhood and resilience against Russian imperial dominance (Lasas, 2012).

Within the Caucasus region, Georgia's relationships were more complex. Azerbaijan shared strategic interests and regional alignment with Georgia, given their joint participation in projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and their mutual geopolitical orientation toward the West. Moreover, both countries faced separatist threats that were partly perceived as Russian-supported. Such common predicaments significantly boosted empathetic identification with Georgia.

In contrast, Armenia's empathetic identification was substantially weaker despite geographic proximity. Armenia's historical and strategic alliance with Russia, including Russian military bases and security guarantees, significantly diminished its solidarity with Georgia. Armenia perceived its relationship with Russia as essential for its own security, thus relegating empathy toward Georgia to a subordinate concern, despite ethnic and cultural proximity within the Caucasus region.

Ukraine represents a unique case of empathetic identification with Georgia, combining elements of shared historical experience, cultural affinity, and mutual geopolitical vulnerability. Prior to the war, Ukraine and Georgia both experienced democratic movements in the early 2000s—the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004) and the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003)—

that intensified bilateral empathy and ideological alignment toward democratic governance and Western integration. Leaders in Kyiv saw Georgia as a kindred democratic partner facing similar pressures from Russia, fostering substantial emotional and political investment in Georgia's security and independence.

4.2.1.2 Threat Perception: Regional Instability and Russian Revisionism

Prior to the conflict, threat perception from Russia significantly shaped third-party countries' engagement with Georgia. Russia's increasingly assertive policies under Vladimir Putin, characterized by intensified nationalism, military modernization, and a willingness to use force to assert regional dominance, heightened concerns among neighboring states, especially in Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space.

Eastern European countries, particularly Poland, perceived Russia's assertiveness as a direct threat to regional stability and their own security. Although already members of NATO and the EU, these nations remained sensitive to any Russian aggression, viewing Georgia as a frontline case of Russian neo-imperialism. Similarly, the Baltic states, deeply wary of Russian influence due to substantial Russian-speaking minorities and historical experiences of occupation, interpreted Russia's policies in Georgia as indicative of broader aggressive intentions in Eastern Europe (Lasas, 2012).

In the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan perceived Russian intervention in Georgia as potentially destabilizing for the entire region. With unresolved conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh and significant Russian influence in neighboring Armenia, Azerbaijan viewed Russian revisionism as a serious security threat. While Azerbaijan did not openly antagonize Russia, it remained quietly apprehensive about the potential consequences of Russian aggression for regional stability.

Armenia, conversely, did not perceive Russia as threatening due to its strategic security partnership. Rather, Armenia viewed Russian actions as stabilizing, reflecting a stark contrast with regional perceptions of threat.

Ukraine's perception of threat from Russia prior to the 2008 conflict was significant, driven by geopolitical vulnerability, unresolved tensions surrounding the Crimean Peninsula, and the presence of a large ethnic Russian minority. Ukrainian policymakers were acutely aware of their vulnerability to similar pressures as those exerted upon Georgia, notably through Russia's overt opposition to Ukraine's NATO aspirations. These concerns were widely articulated by Ukrainian leadership, framing solidarity with Georgia as a necessary strategy to preempt similar aggression against Ukraine.

4.2.1.3 Predictive Typology Based on Theory

To systematically analyze third-party states' predispositions prior to the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, I propose a two-dimensional typology integrating the concepts of empathetic identification and threat perception. My theory suggests that observers' predispositions to engage actively with Georgia would depend primarily on their level of empathy toward Georgia and their perceived threat from Russian revisionism and regional instability. States that identified strongly with Georgia's historical experiences, democratic aspirations, and geopolitical alignment—and that simultaneously viewed Russia's actions as threatening their own security—should demonstrate the greatest readiness for meaningful engagement. Conversely, states lacking identification and perceiving minimal direct threat should show limited or no predisposition for involvement. Intermediate positions are expected where empathy and threat perceptions do not align fully.

Based on my theoretical framework, I predict the following typology of third-party states' predispositions in the Georgian case:

High Empathy × High Threat: Solidarity Hawks

States with both a strong empathetic identification and high perceived threat from Russia should exhibit the greatest predisposition to actively support Georgia. For instance, Poland, the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), and particularly Ukraine exemplify this category. These nations share deep historical trauma from Soviet domination, democratic solidarity with Georgia's post-communist transitions, and direct apprehension regarding renewed Russian assertiveness. Consequently, I expect these states to respond proactively and vigorously to any Russian aggression targeting Georgia.

Mixed Typology: Non-committal Hedger

States that either has High Empathy x Low Threat or Low Empathy x High Threat would be in this category, I place the United States and the European Union (as a bloc), along with Western-aligned states in the Global South (such as democratic states in Latin America and Asia) here. Although these states identified with Georgia’s democratic aspirations and supported its sovereignty rhetorically and diplomatically, they faced no immediate existential threat from Russian revisionism. Their involvement, while genuine, is therefore likely to be tempered and diplomatic rather than overtly forceful or interventionist. On the other hand, my theory anticipates relatively few states with Low Empathy x High Threat. However, it is plausible that certain regional actors—particularly Azerbaijan—could find themselves here. Azerbaijan shares significant strategic interests and regional vulnerabilities with Georgia, notably regarding separatist challenges and Russian influence. However, its historical rivalry, regional competition,

and pragmatic diplomatic posture may limit genuine empathetic identification. I therefore predict cautious, limited engagement from Azerbaijan as well.

Low Empathy × Low Threat: Peripheral Onlooker

States exhibiting neither empathetic identification nor substantial threat perception are predicted to exhibit minimal predisposition toward engagement. Here I include actors such as China, Armenia, and several Russia-aligned states in the Global South (e.g., Venezuela, Cuba). These states lack meaningful cultural or ideological identification with Georgia, viewing Russia's regional activities as distant or even legitimate. Consequently, they are expected to remain indifferent, neutral, or passively aligned with Russia's framing of regional events.

This predictive typology provides a clear analytical framework for anticipating third-party states' responses to Russian aggression against Georgia. By systematically distinguishing empathy and threat perceptions, I establish theoretical expectations regarding state behaviors. The following sections of this chapter will test these predictions against actual responses observed during and after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war.

Table 9 Typology Matrix for Georgia

	High Threat	Low Threat
	Poland, Baltics, Ukraine	**U.S., E.U.**
High Empathy	Shared historical trauma, democratic aspiration	Democratic solidarity, global norms, stability
	Existential fear of being "next"	No direct security risk
	Prediction: Strong reaction	**Prediction: Moderate/limited reaction**
	Azerbaijan	**Armenia, China, Global South**
Low Empathy	Historical rivalry, competition with Georgia	No strong cultural, political, or economic ties to Georgia (hostility in Armenia)
	Shared separatist challenges, fear of Russian revisionism	No direct or indirect security fear of Russia
	Prediction: moderate/limited reaction	**Prediction: weak to no reaction**

4.2.2 Empirical Tests of Hypothesis 1: Heightened Interest in Georgia

Hypothesis 1 posits that third-party interest in foreign violence will be most pronounced in observers who feel strong empathetic identification with the victims and perceive a significant threat from the perpetrators. The 2008 Russo-Georgian war offers a compelling case to test this expectation.

This chapter draws on data from the Integrated Crisis Early Warning System (ICEWS) dataset, which is a comprehensive repository of political "event data" covering countries worldwide. ICEWS was originally developed through a U.S. Defense Department (DARPA) program in the late 2000s, with implementation by Lockheed Martin's Advanced Technology Labs, as part of an effort to build an early-warning system for international crises. In essence, ICEWS continuously gathers reports from thousands of news outlets around the globe and uses automated coding techniques to turn those reports into structured data on political events. The system uses natural language processing to machine-code events from news articles through a

completely automated pipeline. This process allows ICEWS to monitor world affairs in near-real-time and assemble a vast database of who did what to whom in the international arena, all derived from publicly available news sources.

In the context of ICEWS, "event data" refers to a structured representation of discrete political interactions or incidents. Each record in the ICEWS dataset is an "event" capturing an action taken by one political actor toward another on a given date. In practical terms, an event might be a diplomatic meeting, a public statement or protest, a threat of sanctions, the offer of humanitarian aid, or even a military clash. By translating narrative news reports into such standardized records, event data provides a way to quantify and analyze political interactions systematically. This includes not only conflictual or hostile actions but also cooperative and routine diplomatic interactions – anything reported in news media that involves one actor engaging with or affecting another.

To illustrate how the ICEWS dataset operates, consider a few sample events recorded around August 8, 2008, the day hostilities broke out in the Russo-Georgian War. Each event entry contains structured information such as the Event ID, date, source actor, source sector, source country, action type, target actor, target sector, target country, and an associated intensity score.

- Event ID 13485996 records that on August 8, 2008, Mikhail Saakashvili—coded as an elite executive from Georgia's governing party—appealed to engage in or accept mediation with the United States, with an intensity score of +4.0.
- Event ID 13491305 shows that on August 10, 2008, the Russian military was recorded as occupying Georgian territory, with an intensity score of –9.5.

- Event ID 13496608 notes that on August 11, 2008, Angela Merkel—coded as Germany's executive leader—praised or endorsed Georgia, with an intensity score of +3.4.

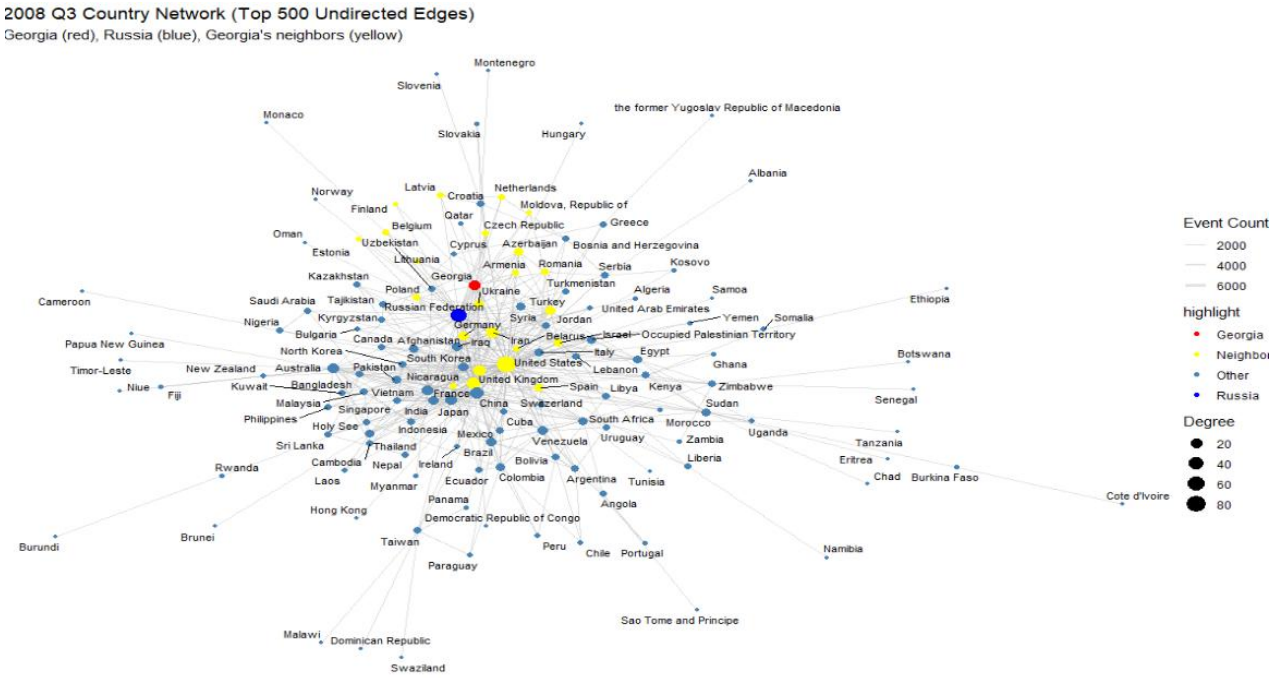
These examples demonstrate that ICEWS can indeed capture real-world political interactions, but they also highlight certain limitations. First, events are often repeated across multiple days as different media outlets continue to report on the same underlying incident. For example, although the major fighting began on August 8 and a ceasefire followed soon after, ICEWS records dozens of daily events coded as some form of "Russia fights Georgia" with remarkably high negative intensity scores (–9.5 or –10) well after the cessation of hostilities. These are not distinct new clashes, but repeated references to the original fighting. While it remains useful to count or compare the overall volume and proportion of such events, one must be cautious not to treat each entry as evidence of fresh escalation.

Second, the coding of event intensity can misrepresent political meaning. Consider a case where ICEWS records one event as "France negotiating with Ukraine" (intensity +5) and another as "France demanding peace with Georgia" (intensity –5). To a human reader, both are parts of France's peace-brokering efforts, which should overall be interpreted as a constructive and positive role. Yet the dataset would average these two entries to zero, implying a neutral stance. This illustrates how aggregated intensity scores can obscure underlying intent, since they cannot capture the nuance of diplomatic context.

For these reasons, in this and the following section I avoid using ICEWS intensity scores as a basis for assessing bilateral relations. Instead, I rely on event counts and interaction patterns, which provide a more stable and interpretable measure of how states engaged during and after the conflict.

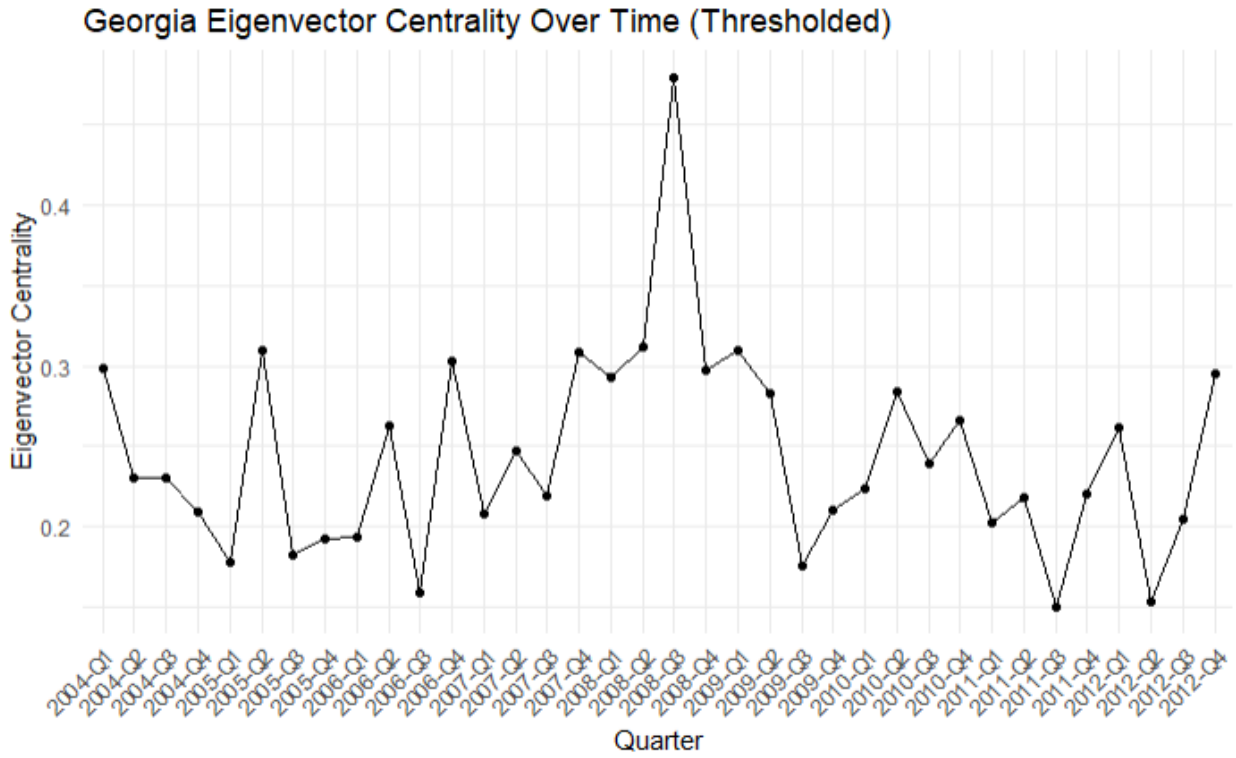
For the international network in Q3 2008, I selected events with a positive intensity score from the ICEWS data and constructed a network analysis using the top 500 most frequent interactions (for ease of visualization, and to rule out meager and infrequent interactions) between any bilateral actors for Quarter 3 of 2008 when the Russo-Georgian War took place.

Figure 19 Network Visualization of World's Bilateral Interactions in 2008 Q3



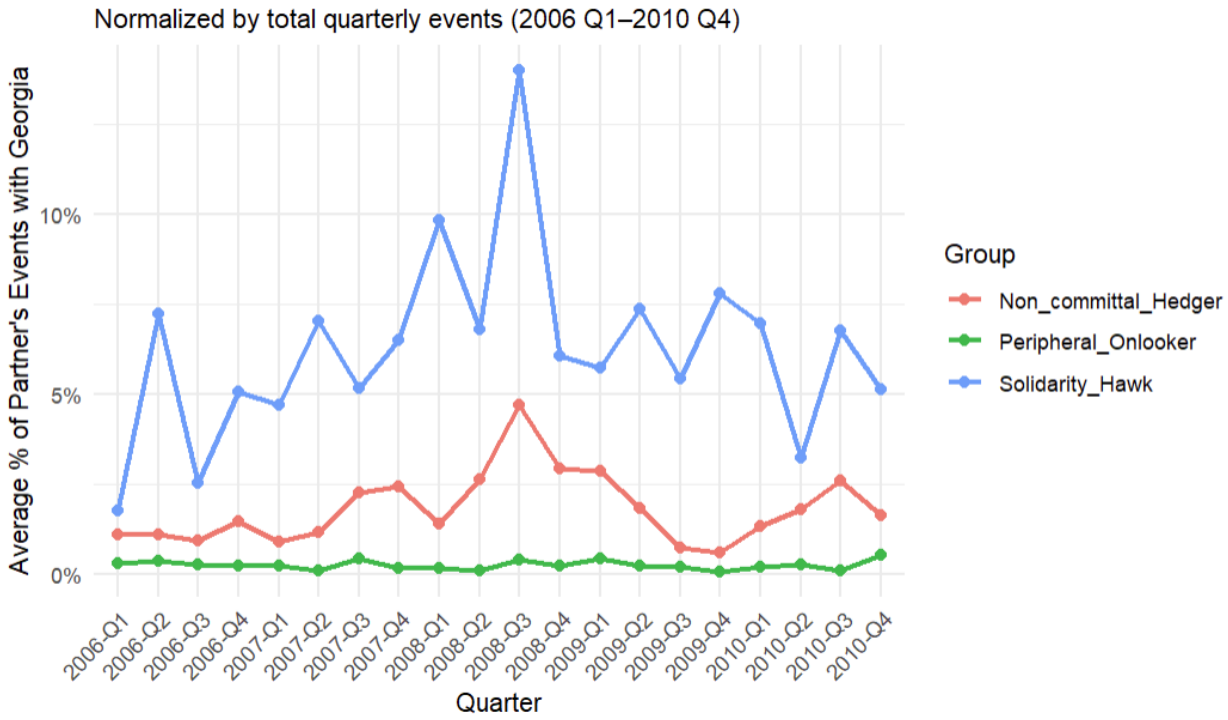
Indeed, we can visually see that the United States and Russia are two of the largest nodes towards the center, but Georgia, a smaller node is still quite central to the international network in Q3 2008. In fact, if we examine the quarterly eigenvalue centrality of Georgia, it peaked in Q3 2008 to reach 0.48, while its value was 0.31 and 0.30 in Q2 and Q4 of 2008, respectively. This sharp spike truly captures the suddenness and immediacy of the Georgian crisis, as well its draw of international attention (See figure 20).

Figure 20 Eigenvalue Centrality Measure of Georgia



Utilizing the network data, a "Georgia share" metric is defined for each country that engaged in interactions with Georgia – specifically, the proportion of that country's total outbound international events during the period that involved Georgia. This proportional indicator serves as a relative measure of salience: the higher the share of a country's undirected interactions focused on Georgia, the greater its observable interest in the Georgian crisis. By emphasizing a country's relative attention (the share of its activity devoted to Georgia) rather than absolute event counts. From these data, we can compare the share of Georgia-related international events across groups of democratic states classified by their empathy–threat profiles according to Table 9.

Figure 21 Georgia's Average Share of Partner States' Events



As illustrated in Figure 21, the share of Georgia-related interactions spiked most prominently among states in the High Empathy × High Threat group (Solidarity Hawk) during Q3 2008—the quarter in which the Russo-Georgian War unfolded. This group, which includes countries that both strongly identified with Georgia and feared Russian aggression, exhibited a marked increase in the proportion of their international engagement devoted to Georgia, far exceeding that of other groups. In contrast, states in the Low Empathy × Low Threat (Peripheral Onlooker) category showed virtually no change in attention, with Georgia-related events remaining a negligible fraction of their overall activity. The Mixed Typology groups—Non-Committal Hedger—displayed moderate levels of attention, falling between the two extremes. These patterns offer strong support for Hypothesis 1: foreign violence generates the highest salience among observers who both empathize with the victim and perceive the perpetrator as a direct threat.

4.2.3 Evidence for Hypothesis 2: Support for Georgia from External Actors

Hypothesis 2 posits that external support for Georgia in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and its aftermath varied according to observers' empathy with Georgia and perceived threat from Russia. In line with this expectation, states classified as Solidarity Hawks provided the most robust support to Georgia, the Non-committal Hedgers offered more moderate backing, and the Peripheral Onlookers showed minimal support. This section documents concrete examples of government aid, diplomatic statements, non-governmental activism, and public solidarity directed at Georgia from 2008 through 2014, illustrating these contrasts. Crucially, the focus here is on affirmative support for Georgia's cause – humanitarian aid, solidarity gestures, and pro-Georgia statements or actions – rather than purely anti-Russian rhetoric (which is addressed in the next section). Evidence from government decisions, NGO initiatives, and public opinion is presented to gauge the intensity of support across distinct categories of states. Polling data, where available, is also included to reflect public attitudes toward Georgia during this period.

4.2.3.1 Solidarity Hawk: Strongest Support for Georgia

States that identified closely with Georgia's plight and simultaneously felt directly menaced by Russian aggression – the High-High group – emerged as the staunchest supporters of Georgia. These were primarily Russia's neighboring democracies and others with historical memories of Soviet domination, for whom the invasion of Georgia resonated on both moral and security grounds. Their governments took decisive supportive actions, and their civil societies rallied passionately behind Georgia. Governmental and Diplomatic Support: Several high-high states made extraordinary political gestures of solidarity with Tbilisi at the peak of the conflict. On August 12, 2008, the presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, and Ukraine (joined by Latvia's Prime Minister) all traveled to Tbilisi in a dramatic show of support for Georgia

(President.PL, 8/12/2008). Such high-profile personal interventions (in a way, putting the heads of state in a danger zone) signaled unequivocal moral and political support for Georgia's independence and territorial integrity.

Ukraine is an interesting case, as mentioned above, the Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko joined the Eastern European leaders in their visit to Tbilisi on Aug 12th, 2008. He did not come empty handed. As early as August 10, 2008 (just two days into the war), Yushchenko's government authorized humanitarian assistance and by August 15 had airlifted 132 tons of aid to Georgia (Lenta.Ru, 8/12/2008, IZ. Ru, 8/15/2008). Yushchenko proclaimed: "We came here to prove your sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence. These are our values… You will never be alone." This explicit pledge of solidarity highlighted Ukraine's empathetic identification with Georgia's struggle. In short, Kyiv treated Georgia's defense as intertwined with its own security, exemplifying the high-high response pattern.

The High-High group's support was not only top-down; it was reinforced by bottom-up enthusiasm among their populations and civil societies. In countries like Poland, the Baltic states, and Ukraine, ordinary citizens and NGOs mobilized almost immediately in solidarity with Georgia. For example, Poland experienced a wave of pro-Georgia demonstrations and civic initiatives as the war unfolded. Beginning on August 9, Polish citizens joined with the Georgian diaspora to protest in front of the Russian Embassy in Warsaw and Russian consulates in cities like Gdańsk, Poznań, and. An umbrella initiative called "Solidarity with Georgia" emerged, organizing rallies that drew up to 300 people – a mix of Georgians living in Poland and Polish supporters – chanting and holding Georgian flags. These gestures were deeply appreciated by Georgians, and even after the immediate ceasefire, Polish society kept up its support. On August 14, 2008, Warsaw's Uprising Museum (itself a symbol of Poland's own resistance history)

teamed with Polish public television to host a solidarity concert for Georgia, featuring Polish and Georgian musicians. At this event, charity organizations collected donations for the victims of the conflict (Human Rights House Foundation, 8/18/2008). Such public engagement in Poland – from street protests to benefit concerts – underscores how strongly the Polish public identified with Georgia's struggle. The empathy was grounded in shared values of freedom and perhaps a reflection of Poland's memory of foreign invasion, while the sense of threat was evident in popular slogans comparing Georgia's situation to what Poland might face if aggression went unchecked. Similar scenes played out in the Baltic countries: in Estonia, for instance, 500 citizens gathered in Tallinn's Town Hall Square on August 11 to protest Russia's invasion and wave Georgian flags (Charter 97, 8/12/2008). That is a significant turnout in a small country, reflecting broad public outrage and fear of Kremlin aggression.

Overall, the Solidarity Hawk group exhibited some of the strongest and most immediate expressions of solidarity with Georgia. Whether through official government channels or grassroots citizen mobilization, their responses were unequivocal, direct, and consistently involved identification with Georgia as a victim. While a small minority within these societies expressed support for Russia, their voices and actions were largely overshadowed by the pronounced and widespread pro-Georgian sentiment. The notable exceptions were Russian-speaking majority regions such as Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, precisely reflecting why non-Russian Ukraine perceived such a heightened sense of threat from Russia's actions.

4.2.3.2 Non-committal Hedger: Moderate Support for Georgia

Observers falling into the "mixed" categories – those high on one dimension (empathy or threat) but not the other – exhibited moderate and nuanced support for Georgia. These states are

expected to aid or voice concerns, but generally in a more restrained or equivocal manner compared to Solidarity Hawks.

Western Europe and other liberal democracies (High Empathy, Lower Threat): Many established Western democracies – such as France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Canada – expressed clear sympathy for Georgia as a victim of aggression and took some supportive actions, even though they did not feel as personally endangered by the conflict as Eastern Europe did. Empathy in this context stemmed from shared democratic values and an opposition to unilateral armed revision of borders. For example, the European Union as a whole (driven by its Western European leaders) responded by mediating an end to the fighting – French President Nicolas Sarkozy negotiated the six-point ceasefire agreement of August 12, 2008 – and then by deploying the EUMM as noted above. These were meaningful acts of support for Georgia's stability. However, Western European powers stopped short of more confrontational measures against Russia or game-changing support to Georgia (such as a fast-track to NATO membership or military aid in 2008), reflecting their lower threat perception and greater caution. Diplomatically, virtually all West European governments condemned Russia's invasion and affirmed Georgia's territorial integrity, aligning with Georgia in principle. For instance, within days of the war, the EU jointly condemned Russia's decision to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, calling on Moscow to reverse course (NATO Press Release, 09/15/2008). The announcement is strong, but hardly timely, by then, the fighting has stopped for months, and there is no real consequence for Russia's defiance. Similarly, the scale of public demonstrations in Western Europe was smaller than in the frontline states, especially considering their often-larger population base – an indicator that while people sympathized with Georgia, the war felt more remote. The non-committal hedgers often couched their support in the language of

international law and human rights (condemning the violation of a sovereign nation) without the visceral urgency seen in Eastern Europe.

On the other hand, Western democracies contributed significantly to economic aid for Georgia. By October 23rd, Countries like Germany, France, the UK, Italy, and others were among the 38 donors pledging billions in reconstruction aid (Civil Georgia, 10/23/2008). The EU institutions themselves pledged hundreds of millions of Euros as grants or loans to Georgia at the October 2008 donor conference (Commission of the European Communities, 2008). This financial support was crucial for Georgia's recovery and demonstrated genuine good will. However, these states balanced their empathy with diplomatic and economic considerations vis-à-vis Russia (which will be discussed in the next section).

In the United States, public empathy for Georgia was reasonably strong – media coverage in August 2008 portrayed tiny democratic Georgia as a victim of big-power bullying, and political leaders from both parties voiced support. Republican presidential candidate John McCain's proclamation "we are all Georgians" (CBS News, 08/12/2008) captured this sentiment, though Democratic candidate (and future President) Barack Obama's initial calls for restraint on both sides indicated a more tempered empathy. Ultimately, the U.S. as noted gave substantial non-military aid and diplomatic backing to Georgia. President Bush announced an economic and humanitarian aid package of approximately $1 billion (National Archives and Records Administration, 09/03/2008), yet even Washington refrained from any military intervention or immediate security guarantees, underscoring the limits of a high-empathy actor that does not feel an immediate threat to itself, consistent with a supportive but moderate stance.

The other mixed category – states that felt unease at Russia's actions but lacked a strong emotional or ideological alignment with Georgia – yielded some of the most nuanced behaviors.

These include countries in Russia's orbit or region that quietly worried about the precedent of invading a neighbor yet had political or cultural reasons not to side openly with Georgia. For example, consider Azerbaijan. As Georgia's immediate neighbor and fellow post-Soviet republic, Azerbaijan had much to lose from a Russian encroachment in the Caucasus (not least because its crucial oil and gas pipelines run through Georgia). This implies a threat perception: Baku's leaders were surely alarmed that Moscow might seek to redraw regional lines. However, Azerbaijan's government under Ilham Aliyev shared less liberal affinity with Georgia's leadership and was constrained by its own relationship with Russia. The result was a muted, hedging response. Officially, Azerbaijan called for peace and respected Georgia's territorial integrity, but it avoided strong pro-Georgian statements that might provoke Russia. Similarly, Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states likely felt a degree of threat seeing a powerful patron violate a smaller state's sovereignty. Yet their empathy for Georgia – a distant, pro-Western state – was limited, and they were bound by strategic dependence on Russia. These governments offered almost no support to Georgia; at most they issued neutral statements or echoed Russia's narrative.

In sum, the non-committal hedgers did rally to Georgia's side in terms of aid, statements, and principles, but their support tended to be institutional and humanitarian rather than military or truly transformative. They were not as alarmed as the frontline states, leading to a less urgent tone in their support.

4.2.3.3 Peripheral Onlooker: Minimal Support for Georgia

At the opposite end of the spectrum, observers with little emotional identification with Georgia and no sense of personal threat from the conflict gave scant support or attention to Georgia's cause. These were typically states geographically distant from the Caucasus, lacking

historical or ideological ties to Georgia, or those aligned with Russia's worldview. Their reactions during 2008 ranged from neutral passivity to, in a few cases, overt support for Russia's position. In either case, pro-Georgian actions were minimal, consistent with Hypothesis 2's expectation that when neither empathy nor threat galvanize an actor, they will invest little in supporting a foreign victim of aggression.

Many countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia fell into this low-low category with respect to the Georgia war. For them, the conflict was a remote great-power skirmish with no direct stakes. Their governments generally avoided taking sides, often issuing boilerplate calls for peaceful resolution without singling out Russia. For instance, China – while a U.N. Security Council member – maintained an officially neutral line, urging dialogue and restraint. Beijing had low empathy for Georgia (a small pro-Western democracy) and did not view the event as a threat to China's own security[3]. Although China did not endorse Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (out of principle regarding separatism), it also did not lend any support to Tbilisi beyond diplomatic niceties. India, likewise, stayed largely silent. In international forums like the U.N. General Assembly, when Georgia later raised resolutions (such as on the rights of internally displaced persons from the conflict regions), many peripheral onlookers chose to abstain or be absent, signaling a lack of engagement. The global South's public opinion generally did not register the Georgia war strongly – overshadowed by other concerns – and thus there was no grassroots pressure on those governments to support Georgia. No solidarity rallies or NGO campaigns of note occurred in these regions for Georgia as they did for, say, later crises like Syria or Ukraine. This widespread indifference meant that Georgia's

[3] China was preoccupied hosting the 2008 Olympics at the time, I heard rumors from my personal connections that the leadership in China was furious as the war occurred on the same day as the Olympics' Opening Ceremony, indicating Putin's lack of respect and consideration towards China. This makes sense but can hardly be verified in any way.

support coalition internationally was relatively narrow, concentrated in the West and a few regional partners.

4.2.3.4 Summary Table for International Support towards Georgia

Table 10 International Support towards Georgia

Typology group	Illustrative members	Expected support profile (H2)	Observed support, 2008
Solidarity Hawk	Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine	Timely, substantive aid and support	Early, public, and sustained backing; elite signaling; joint visits/solidarity; military/technical assistance where feasible; pressure in IOs
Non-committal Hedger	US, UK, Germany, France, Nordics, EU institutions, NATO, Azerbaijan	Limited, nuanced, and cautious support	Official condemnations; EU-brokered ceasefire; humanitarian aid
Peripheral Onlooker	China, India, Belarus, Armenia, Central Asian autocracies, some non-aligned states	Little to no support	Silence, neutrality

In conclusion, the 2008 Russo-Georgian War provides empirical weight to Hypothesis 2: external support for a victim state was indeed strongest among observers who both empathized with the victim and felt threatened themselves, moderate among those with only one of those motivations, and weakest where neither condition applied. This pattern underscores how moral identification and security interests together galvanized some states and societies to stand with Georgia, whereas their absence bred indifference – a dynamic that will recur in other case studies of foreign conflict spillover.

4.2.4 Evidence for Hypothesis 3: Hostility Toward Russia After the 2008 Georgia War

Hypothesis 3 posits that third-party states became more hostile and defensive toward Russia following its 2008 war against Georgia, with the intensity of their anti-Russian responses conditioned by each state's empathy for Georgia and perception of threat from Moscow. The evidence strongly supports this pattern. Solidarity Hawks – mostly Eastern European countries emotionally invested in Georgia's plight and directly fearing Russian aggression – reacted with the most vehement anti-Russian rhetoric and actions. The Non-committal Hedgers showed more measured hostility: they condemned Russia and took some countermeasures, but in a restrained or cautious manner. Meanwhile, Peripheral Onlooker states generally showed little interest in punishing or confronting Russia; many remained neutral or even sympathetic to Moscow's narrative.

4.2.4.1 Solidarity Hawks: Strongest Anti-Russian Responses

Countries that identified closely with Georgia as a fellow small democracy and simultaneously felt directly menaced by Russia – notably Russia's near neighbors with painful memories of Soviet domination – unleashed the strongest anti-Russian responses. In this group (led by Poland, the Baltic states, and Ukraine), leaders' rhetoric cast Russia as an existential danger, governments undertook bold gestures defying Moscow, and publics mobilized in outrage against Russian aggression.

As Russian tanks rolled into Georgia, Eastern European leaders issued stark warnings. Standing beside Georgia's president at a mass rally in Tbilisi on August 12, 2008. Poland's President Lech Kaczyński stood beside Georgia's embattled leader and declared to the crowd: "Everyone knows the next one could be Ukraine, and then Poland. All of Europe should be here now." (CBS, 8/12/2008) His warning underscored the shared threat perception uniting these

countries – they believed Russian aggression against Georgia foreshadowed dangers to their own sovereignty. Estonia's president Toomas Ilves, likewise, on the podium in Tbilisi, famously proclaimed "I am a Georgian," echoing John F. Kennedy's Cold War-era solidarity with Berlin (ERR, 8/8/2018). Ukrainian officials likewise explicitly linked Georgia's fate to their own: "Georgia today, Ukraine tomorrow?" became a haunting refrain in Kyiv. These statements underscored a shared perception that Russia's aggression was not an isolated incident but a harbinger of imperialist expansion. Even in domestic forums, Eastern European politicians hammered Moscow. For example, late in 2008 Polish leaders, recalling decades of Soviet occupation, argued that Russia's actions in Georgia proved Moscow's fundamentally revisionist, dangerous intent, reinforcing Poland's calls for NATO vigilance (as reported in contemporary parliamentary debates and media). Such uncompromising rhetoric – invoking memories of 1938 and 1968 – illustrates how high-empathy, high-threat states framed Russia as a dire menace that had to be confronted.

Aside from rhetoric and gestures, Eastern European states lobbied vigorously within NATO and the EU for tough responses. Poland and the Baltic countries pushed NATO to accelerate Georgia's membership prospects and demanded that "business as usual" with Moscow be suspended after its breach of peace. Indeed, NATO did freeze certain ties with Russia – meetings of the NATO-Russia Council were halted in the war's wake – under pressure from these frontline states. High-threat neighbors also took unilateral defensive steps: Ukraine's pro-Western president, Viktor Yushchenko, imposed new restrictions on Russia's Black Sea Fleet (based in Crimea) to limit its freedom of movement after that fleet aided the assault on Georgia. Ukraine's government also rushed through emergency aid to Georgia (over 130 tons airlifted by mid-August) and warned that Ukraine's own sovereignty was on the line. In Poland, leaders

accelerated plans to host a U.S. missile defense shield – a decision widely seen as prompted by the Georgian war and aimed at deterring Russian missile threats. Collectively, these actions illustrate how states that both empathized with Georgia and feared they could be "next" responded with concrete, often unprecedented measures to bolster defenses and isolate Russia. While Western Europe hesitated (see below), Eastern Europe's message to Moscow was one of unmistakable hostility and vigilance.

4.2.4.2 Non-committal Hedger: Moderate and Calibrated Antagonism

States that fell into "mixed" categories – high empathy but low threat, or low empathy but high threat – reacted to Russia's war with more moderate hostility. They generally condemned Moscow's actions and showed some adversarial response, but their rhetoric and measures were more restrained, nuanced, or cautious compared to the High-High group. Two sub-groups illustrate this: Western liberal democracies (high empathy for Georgia's plight, but geographically distant or less personally threatened) and certain post-Soviet or regional states (high threat awareness due to regional security concerns, but limited empathy or alignment with Georgia). Both types registered some increase in anti-Russian sentiment and defensive steps, yet they often balanced or tempered their hostility due to other interests.

Many established Western democracies (e.g., France, Germany, the UK, Canada, the United States) strongly sympathized with Georgia as a victim of aggression and voiced moral outrage at Russia, but they did not feel immediately endangered themselves. Their rhetoric condemned Russia's violation of international law – for example, virtually all Western European leaders issued statements in August 2008 affirming Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and decrying Russia's disproportionate military force. However, despite this rhetoric, Western governments' concrete actions remained limited, most likely due to their lower threat perception,

and unwillingness to shoulder any heavy economic or political burdens. The EU, spearheaded by France's President Nicolas Sarkozy, brokered a ceasefire rather than punishing Russia militarily. NATO did not offer Georgia an immediate Membership Action Plan after the war (to the disappointment of Eastern Europe), and no sweeping sanctions were imposed on Russia in 2008. Instead, Western powers pursued a calibrated response and also a quick return to engagement with Russia.

Germany and France's actions are notable examples for this cautious approach. Germany's response was mixed: Chancellor Angela Merkel initially urged restraint on all sides and was reluctant to alienate Moscow (Germany at that time relied heavily on Russian energy and had advocated against offering Georgia a fast NATO Membership Action Plan earlier in 2008). However, Merkel did visit Georgia on August 23th, noticeably after the fighting has stopped, and her visit left many Georgians disappointed as she commented, "Given the situation with [breakaway] Abkhazia and South Ossetia, we can't talk about the swift integration of Georgia into NATO," she said. "At least this is Germany's position, and it will remain as such." Also, during her two-day visit, Merkel also conspicuously shunned the term "occupation" to describe the situation. (Eurasianet, 08/24/2008). This indicates moderate antagonism towards Russia – Germany empathized with Georgia's aspirations and suffering, yet its sense of threat from Russia was milder, so their action took a cautious diplomatic form rather than bold action. France, while sympathetic and actively involved in brokering a ceasefire, also exemplified a moderate and balanced approach. Paris dispatched President Sarkozy to mediate the six-point agreement on August 12, 2008, which formally brought the conflict to a halt and affirmed Georgia's territorial integrity—albeit in terms that allowed for limited peacekeeping functions near breakaway (ABC News, 8/13/2008). After the ceasefire, French diplomacy sought to

stabilize relations with Moscow relatively quickly, re-engaging Russia through the EU framework and emphasizing dialogue over prolonged confrontation. On October 21st, the then French President Sarkozy commented "Europe should no longer be an accomplice of another Cold War" and "I don't believe the world needs a crisis between Europe and Russia" (Civil Georgia, 10/21/2008); On October 22nd, then French minister Jouyet said that Georgia's NATO membership was "not in the interest of Europe or its relations with Russia (France 24, 10/23/2008)." This nuanced posture—measured antagonism towards Russia—reflects France's balancing act between normative solidarity and strategic pragmatism.

A different mix of states felt uneasy about Russia's belligerence but lacked a strong emotional or ideological bond with Georgia, often due to divergent politics, historic rivalry, or cultural distance. These included some post-Soviet republics and authoritarian neighbors who quietly feared the precedent of Russia invading a neighbor. Yet, they were reluctant to side with Georgia. For example, Azerbaijan – Georgia's immediate neighbor and partner in energy transit – had strategic reasons to be alarmed (its vital oil pipeline runs through Georgia, and Azeri leaders knew their own territory could be vulnerable in a world where might makes right). However, Azerbaijan's government under Ilham Aliyev had little affinity with Georgia's pro-Western leadership and remained tightly constrained by Russia's regional power. Azeri officials did not join Western sanctions or support Georgia militarily; instead, they took care not to provoke Moscow (for instance, continuing cooperation with Russia on security and energy). Similar patterns occurred in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states: these regimes had low empathy for Georgia's democratic aspirations and high economic dependence on Russia, so they toed a careful line – issuing no condemnations and in some cases echoing elements of Russia's narrative blaming Georgia. Notably, at a Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit shortly

after the war, China and Central Asian members stopped short of endorsing Russia's recognition of Abkhazia/S. Ossetia but also avoided rebuking Moscow – a stance reflecting low empathy but moderate threat concern. These states' responses were "lukewarm": they neither cheered Russia's aggression nor actively opposed it, landing in a gray zone consistent with Hypothesis 3's expectation of moderate and conditional hostility when threat is felt in the absence of strong empathy.

4.2.4.3 Peripheral Onlooker: Minimal Interest or Antagonism

As explained in 4.2.3.3, states that neither identified with Georgia nor felt threatened by Russia paid little attention to the events. They neither showed support for Georgia, nor increased hostility towards Russia.

Most low-empathy, low-threat governments avoided taking sides or condemning Russia. For example, China's reaction was studiously neutral. Busy hosting the 2008 Olympics and cautious about setting precedents for separatism, Beijing urged "restraint and dialogue" but did not criticize Moscow – notably, China declined to endorse Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (since China opposes secession on principle), yet it offered no support to Georgia either. The Indian government likewise stayed quiet, treating the war as a remote issue; India made no significant statement beyond generic appeals for peace. Many countries in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia followed suit, issuing at most boilerplate statements through the UN about respecting sovereignty in general terms. In fact, some states openly sided with Russia. Notably, Nicaragua (under President Daniel Ortega) and later Venezuela chose to recognize the independence of the two Russian-occupied Georgian regions – becoming the only countries aside from Russia to do so at the time. This de jure backing of Moscow's landgrab (announced by Nicaragua in early September 2008) reflected ideological alignment with Russia and zero affinity

for Georgia's Western orientation. Belgrade (Serbia), angered by Western support for Kosovo's independence, was sympathetic to Russia's rationale and did not condemn the Kremlin. Similarly, South Africa and others in the Non-Aligned Movement treated the conflict as a great-power issue and avoided blameful language toward Russia. In summary, where a country felt no kinship with Georgia and no fear of Russian power, it typically saw little need to respond adversely to Russia's actions. Some even used the occasion to affirm principles favoring state sovereignty selectively (as China did) or to score diplomatic points with Moscow.

4.2.4.4 Summary Table for International Reaction towards Russia in 2008

Typology group	Illustrative members	Expected support profile (H3)	Observed support, 2008
Solidarity Hawk	Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine	Timely, high-profile, strong reaction against the perpetrator	Forceful condemnations; agenda-setting in EU/NATO; advocacy for stronger penalties; stepped-up defense postures/exercises; acceleration of diversification away from Russian energy where feasible
Non-committal Hedger	US, UK, Germany, France, Nordics, EU institutions, NATO, Azerbaijan	Limited, nuanced, and cautious reaction against the perpetrator	Moderate public censure; short-lived suspensions (e.g., talks/fora) followed by normalization; emphasis on ceasefire monitoring/mediation; reluctance to impose broad economic sanctions
Peripheral Onlooker	China, India, Belarus, Armenia, Central Asian autocracies, some non-aligned states	Little to no hostile reaction	Neutral or Russia-leaning statements; maintenance of military/economic cooperation; avoidance of international censure

In summary, the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 provides compelling evidence for Hypothesis 3. Third-party hostility toward Russia escalated most sharply among observers who both empathized with Georgia and feared Russian aggression, moderate hostility emerged when only one of those drivers was present, and minimal reaction occurred where neither condition

was met. High-high states like Poland and the Baltics became stridently anti-Russian in both word and deed, blending moral condemnation with tangible defensive moves. Mixed-type states offered lukewarm or qualified pushback – condemning the Kremlin but stopping short of risky confrontation. And low-low states largely stayed on the sidelines, with a few even aligning with Moscow's stance. Notably, these patterns mirror those documented for support to Georgia (Hypothesis 2) but on the other side: those unwilling to support Georgia were likewise unwilling to antagonize Russia. The findings underscore that it was the fusion of intergroup empathy and threat perception that galvanized countries and publics against Russia's 2008 aggression. Absent those forces, Russia's actions met little resistance. This variation in hostility has had lasting implications – analysts argue that the weak international backlash in 2008 (due largely to many states' low threat/empathy calculations) emboldened Russia for future adventurism. Conversely, in states where Georgia's fight struck a chord and sounded an alarm, the war cemented a deeply negative view of Putin's Russia, presaging the robust opposition these same countries would later show during Russia's invasions of Ukraine. Thus, the 2008 war vividly demonstrates how empathy and threat together drive whether third parties will respond to foreign aggression with outrage and counteraction or with indifference, fulfilling the expectations of Hypothesis 3.

4.3 Case 2 – The 2014 Annexation of Crimea and 2022 Invasion of Ukraine

While the short but important Georgian War signaled to the world that Putin's Russia was not afraid to use deadly forces internationally to get what it wants, its impact and significance was quickly overshadowed by the situation in Ukraine. However, it is the two are not isolated incidents, in fact, without the prior event in Georgia, the situation in Ukraine might not have galvanized such a strong international response.

4.3.1 Evolving Preconditions for Third-Party Engagement: 2014 vs 2022

Before examining third-party reactions and impact themselves, it is crucial to compare the pre-event conditions that shaped how external democracies perceived and positioned themselves prior to Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and its 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Two perceptual factors stand out as especially influential: empathetic identification with Ukraine (the extent of cultural affinity, shared identity, or moral solidarity) and threat perception (the degree to which Russia's aggressive moves were seen as risks to regional or global security). This section contrasts these dimensions in the lead-up to the 2014 and 2022 crises, drawing on diplomatic discourse, opinion polls, and policy documents. The focus is on transatlantic democracies (North America and Europe), with notable outliers and other global actors discussed where relevant.

4.3.1.1 Empathetic Identification in 2014 vs. 2022

2014 – Limited Identification with Crimea and a Nascent Solidarity

In early 2014, global sympathy toward Ukraine was evident but uneven. Most Western governments stood on principle to support Ukraine's territorial integrity, yet emotional identification with Crimea itself remained limited. Many outsiders quietly noted Russia's long historical ties to Crimea, which blunted their sense of outrage. Even officials who condemned Moscow's actions often added that it was "not surprising" Russia would reclaim a territory that had historically been part of Russia. And the idea that Crimea was a "present" from Khrushchev to Ukraine in 1954 also gained traction (Sasse, 2017). Such views – implying that Crimea was "really Russian" – echoed Russian narratives and glossed over Crimea's indigenous Tatar and Ukrainian identities. As a result, Ukraine's loss of Crimea in 2014 was acknowledged as illegal but not widely felt as a deep emotional wrong in much of the West. The broader public in many

Western countries still saw Ukraine as distant and not yet "one of us," an image reinforced by old stereotypes of Ukraine as politically unstable or peripheral. This ambivalence translated into a relatively tepid popular reaction at the time, even as leaders-imposed sanctions and issued legal condemnations.

Yet empathy for Ukraine was far from absent – it simply varied by country. Certain democracies already felt a natural affinity with Ukrainians' aspirations before the Crimea crisis erupted. In late 2013, for instance, the sight of Ukrainians waving EU flags during the Maidan protests resonated strongly in nations that champion democratic values. Eastern Europe in particular exhibited high early empathy. Poland and the Baltic states, sharing cultural-historical ties with Ukraine and bitter memories of Soviet domination, viscerally identified with Kyiv's plight. These countries had long seen Ukraine's fate as intertwined with their own. As mentioned before, in 2008, Poland's President Lech Kaczyński warned during Russia's invasion of Georgia: "Today Georgia, tomorrow Ukraine, the day after tomorrow the Baltic States, and later perhaps… Poland!". This prophetic remark underscored a fraternal bond – Poland and its neighbors felt that what happened to Georgia or Ukraine could easily happen to them. By 2014, Poland, the Baltic republics, and nearby democracies were strongly backing Ukraine not only on legal grounds but out of empathy born of shared history and geographic vulnerability. Countries with significant Ukrainian diaspora populations or a staunch commitment to the post-Cold War order would also show early solidarity. For example, Canada, home to roughly 1.4 million people of Ukrainian descent (one of the world's largest Ukrainian diasporas), should have a relatively strong level of empathy towards Ukraine.

These empathetic currents should be most pronounced in Eastern Europe and diaspora-heavy nations, and less so among publics farther removed. In sum, on the eve of Crimea's

annexation, Ukraine enjoyed backing across the West but only nascent emotional solidarity in many quarters – with notable exceptions in those states that felt Ukraine's struggle as their struggle due to history, geography, or community ties. Each country's preexisting connection to Ukraine (or lack thereof) shaped how deeply its people empathized with Crimea's plight when the 2014 crisis hit.

2022 – "We Are All Ukrainians": Surge of Empathy and Shared Identity

In stark contrast, on the eve of the 2022 invasion and especially once it unfolded, empathetic identification with Ukraine became far more widespread across the democratic world. I argue that the event in 2014 has realigned many states in the world towards the quadrant of Solidarity Hawks.

Original solidarity hawks in 2014 experienced drastic hardening of their position against Russia because of the annexation of Crimea, along with Ukraine, they embarked on years long journey to advocate for safer Eastern Europe and tries to lobby the rest of the world to see Russia's threat. Their effort as a reaction to the 2014 incident became a driver and priori for 2022.

On the other hand, though non-committal hedgers did not engage in drastic or persistent efforts to help Ukraine in 2014, the limited aid they provide can facilitate or establish new empathetic bonds when the interact. Aid workers and diplomatic goodwill since 2014 would inevitably give Ukraine a chance to appeal to these potential partners. Though these states might not have intended their limited gesture to take immediate effect, it has laid the groundwork for a much stronger empathetic tie when a second wave of violence hit.

The evolution and deepening of empathetic bonds can be understood through the lens of the intergroup empathy literature. During the initial annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of

conflict in Eastern Ukraine, observers experienced primarily *affective empathy*—an immediate emotional response to the victims' suffering. Over time, however, sustained aid efforts, communication, and repeated interactions with Ukrainians fostered *cognitive empathy*, a more enduring and reflective form of identification. Thus, when Russia launched a second wave of aggression in 2022, the renewed surge of affective empathy was layered upon preexisting cognitive empathy, prompting many observers to shift from being non-committal hedgers to becoming "solidarity hawks."

A useful analogy can be drawn from Rwanda. The 1994 genocide exposed not only the failures of U.N. intervention but also the consequences of the absence of preexisting empathetic bonds. The lack of such ties delayed international responses until the scale of atrocities became undeniable, at which point affective empathy was triggered. Subsequent global attention, remembrance, and institutional reforms gradually built a more durable cognitive empathy toward the Tutsi victims. Were a second wave of mass violence against them to occur, it is unlikely the international community would again remain so passive, precisely because empathy had been strengthened. The Ukrainian case follows a similar trajectory: the initial shock of Crimea planted the seeds of empathy, while years of continued engagement nurtured them into deeper solidarity, which decisively shaped responses in 2022.

As a result, by 2022 Ukraine had come to be seen not as a distant "former Soviet republic" but as a fellow European democracy fighting for its survival – in effect, "one of us." Top EU officials explicitly invoked a language of kinship. This shift was driven in part by Ukraine's own post-2014 reforms and self-presentation as a European nation. I argue that Ukraine had an image of a corrupt, distant, ex-Soviet republic in the minds of many in the West. However, the intermittent years with near constant fighting in its eastern regions, a widespread

reporting of Russian encroachment, Ukrainian diaspora and the charismatic Zelensky all contributed to reshaping the image of Ukraine. The result was a broad moral identification: Ukraine was increasingly viewed as a frontline defender of the liberal democratic community, evoking what one might term a collective "we."

In summary, empathetic engagement evolved markedly from 2014 to 2022. Where third-party empathy in 2014 was tempered, by 2022 it had transformed into a much more personalized solidarity across the transatlantic world. The general trend was clear – between 2014 and 2022, Ukraine moved in Western perception from the periphery to the heart of an imagined community of democratic nations.

4.3.1.2 Shifting Threat Perceptions: Crimea Reclamation vs. Prelude to Full Invasion

If empathy concerning "how much we care about the victim" has increased between 2014 to 2022, threat perception addressing "how much we fear" also intensified by 2022. The two crises elicited vastly different appraisals of the danger Russia's actions posed to the wider world.

2014 – A Contained Gambit, Underestimations of Threat:

Russia's stealthy build-up to the seizure of Crimea in 2014 undoubtedly alarmed Western governments – it was the first forcible annexation of European territory since WWII – but the sense of immediate threat it generated was, in retrospect, restrained. The Crimean situation was viewed with conflicting feelings. The guise of a referendum, and the legitimacy of "national self-determination" all give credence to the problem in Crimea. Putin's move can be interpreted with an understanding nod to his desire to unify those willing to join Russia, a limited gambit rather than the start of a broader campaign. And although eastern flank states (Poland, the Baltics, etc.) urgently warned that Moscow's revanchism was a harbinger of worse to come. Some major Western European capitals remained less convinced of an existential threat.

2022 – A Wake-Up Call to Global Security:

However, Russia's behavior between 2014 and 2022 can hardly be seen as deescalating. If anyone has hoped that Crimea would have satiated Russia's appetite, their hope was soon ridiculed by Russia's continued effort in Eastern Ukraine feeding and arming the separatist movement into a pro-longed conflict. Many in the world began to see Russia as aggressive, unsatiable, and a threat to the entire world order and peace rather than a containable threat.

Just as intergroup empathy helps explain the buildup and deepening of solidarity between 2014 and 2022, concepts from reputation and repeated game theory clarify why many observers felt more threatened in 2022. In rationalist models of war, states often have incentives to conceal their true preferences or capabilities: offensive actors may pose as defensive, while weaker actors may seek to appear strong. Under such conditions, costly signaling becomes crucial actions that impose actual costs on the sender can reveal information about its "type."

Applied to the Ukraine context, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 functioned as a costly signal, providing observers with added information about Moscow's willingness to use force. The subsequent years, marked by continued belligerent rhetoric and military buildup, constituted additional "rounds" in a repeated game. These interactions reinforced perceptions of Russia's revisionist intentions and revealed that appeasement was unlikely to succeed. By 2022, many observers interpreted the invasion not as an aberration but as the predictable behavior of an aggressive actor, thereby heightening their sense of threat and prompting more forceful responses.

The build-up to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and especially the invasion itself, fundamentally altered threat perceptions in a way 2014 did not. In late 2021, as Moscow massed over 150,000 troops on Ukraine's borders, U.S. and UK intelligence warnings

sounded an alarm that many in Europe initially greeted with skepticism. Memories of past intelligence errors (such as Iraq 2003) and perhaps wishful thinking led some allies – and even many Ukrainians – to doubt that Putin would launch an all-out war (Tellis, 2024). Nevertheless, the very fact of those intensive consultations and stark warnings indicated a heightened preparedness, quite unlike the lack of mobilization and warning prior to annexation of Crimea.

In summary, the contrast is sharp: prior to Crimea's annexation, the situation was initially seen through a lens of a manageable regional crisis – serious but not an existential challenge – to most states in the west, whereas the build-up towards the 2022 invasion was recognized as a systemic threat requiring an urgent and sweeping response that Russia can no longer be tolerated to keep its expansion. The evolution in threat perceptions between these two episodes set the stage for a much more unified and intense third-party engagement in 2022, as subsequent chapters will detail.

4.3.1.3 Typological Shift: Empathy-Threat Matrix for 2014 vs. 2022

To better illustrate these changing preconditions, it is useful to categorize countries' stances in a simple 2×2 matrix: one axis represents the level of empathetic identification with Ukraine (high vs. low), and the other represents the level of perceived threat from Russia's actions (high vs. low). By placing states into "high/low" combinations for the 2014 and 2022 crises, we can see how different third parties fit (or shifted between) particular response typologies.

High Empathy / High Threat (Solidarity Hawks):

In this quadrant, countries strongly identify with Ukraine's cause and feel acutely threatened by Russia's aggression. In 2014, the core members of this group were the transatlantic East-European democracies most proximate to Russia. Poland, Georgia, and the Baltic states

epitomized this type – they had profound historical empathy with Ukraine (as another post-Soviet nation resisting Moscow's domination) and simultaneously saw Russia's assault as a direct menace to their own security. These actors in 2014 led calls for a firm response. By 2022, this High/High category expanded significantly. The entire NATO eastern flank – from Estonia to Romania – was now undeniably in this camp, joined by countries like the United Kingdom and Nordic states, the U.S. and Canada. The intermittent years between 2014 to 2022, these states sees an increasingly obstinate and aggressive Russia, with the hope that Crimea would satisfy Putin's appetite fading, by the start of the 2022 war, these states have deepened their ties with the new Ukrainian government, enhancing empathy while simultaneously becoming more and more wary of Russia's rhetoric and propaganda against the rest of Ukraine. In short, the High/High coalition in 2022 became both broader and more cohesive, reflecting a convergence of empathy and threat awareness that was far less uniform in 2014.

Mixed Typology (Non-committal Onlooker):

This quadrant includes countries that strongly sympathize with Ukraine on values or identity grounds but do not perceive a serious direct security threat to themselves from the crisis. In 2014, most NATO allies and partners on Europe's periphery fit this profile. However, many of them would shift to become High Empathy/High Threat in 2022, for example, France and Germany did not consider Russia to be a major threat prior to the annexation of Crimea. However, by 2022, the mobilization and eventual declaration of war clearly prompted most European states to consider Russia to a direct and predominant threat. That is not to say everyone feels the same degree of threat. For instance, Spain and Portugal unequivocally supported Ukraine's sovereignty and condemned Russia – out of commitment to democratic norms – but given their geographic distance and minimal strategic entanglement with Russia, they did not

feel personally endangered by the Crimea episode. Similarly, countries like Italy or Greece (while historically having warmer ties with Russia) did support EU sanctions in 2014 on principle; their public empathy for Ukraine existed, yet the situation felt remote to their security calculus. By 2022, the High Empathy/Low Threat category both lost and gained new members, as mentioned above, I argue that U.K., Eastern Europe, U.S. and Canada have joined the High x High category; other democracies such as Japan and South Korea, for example, are now more empathetic towards Ukraine, Russia's continued aggression against a Western aligning democratic state resonates with them, yet these Asian democracies remain geographically removed from any immediate Russian military threat (their main security concerns lie elsewhere, e.g. China or North Korea). (Though Japan does have territorial dispute with Russia, but it is much more minor and while Russia's focus shifts to Europe, Japan's border dispute arguably becomes less concerning.) Likewise, Western European neutrals such as Ireland, or distant NATO members like Iceland, felt little personal peril from Russia but would be unambiguous emotionally and diplomatically inclined to support Ukraine. The key rationale in this quadrant is normative and humanitarian: these countries view Ukraine's struggle as morally compelling, even if their own security is only indirectly affected.

States that fit the Low Empathy x High Threat category would be rare, as it would capture actors who feel realistically threatened by Russia's aggression yet exhibit relatively low identification or empathy with Ukraine. In theory, such states might aid Ukraine out of self-interest while lacking emotional solidarity. In 2014, virtually no NATO or EU country openly fit this description – those who felt highly threatened (Eastern Europe) also tended to empathize strongly. However, one might argue Turkey and the former Central Asian Soviet Republics approached this quadrant. Turkey had strategic reasons to worry about Russian expansion (threat

to regional balance), but Ankara's empathy with Ukraine was lukewarm. Azerbaijan's situation is similar to 2008 Georgia case, while the Central Asian states are neither Western aligned nor culturally related to Ukraine, but they have legitimate reason to fear Russian aggression. Their security is often intertwined with Russia's security guarantee and that of China (the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization respectively). Generally, however, among transatlantic democracies *directly* fearing Russia, virtually all were also emotionally galvanized to support Ukraine, making pure "low empathy, high threat" cases an exception in both 2014 and 2022.

Low Empathy / Low Threat (Peripheral Onlooker):

This quadrant captures those states that felt little cultural or ideological affinity with Ukraine and saw minimal threat to themselves from the conflict. In 2014, a considerable number of countries globally fell into this category – notably many in the Global South. A major power, China did have cordial relationship with Ukraine, in fact, some argue that Ukraine served as a conduit between China with Europe in many regards. However, the relationship's importance was far less important than China's ambiguous cooperation with Russia across various issues. So, it is not surprise that China would feel low empathy and low threat in this case. India likewise would feel little d concern in 2014 driven by longstanding ties to Russia and lack of direct stakes – New Delhi neither emotionally identified with Kyiv nor feared any harm to its own security. Fast forward to 2022, and the Low/Low group, while shrinking in the West, remained sizeable on the world stage. Most of Latin America, Africa and Asia would have no direct stake in this war. Major democracies like India, South Africa, Brazil, and of course the non-democratic China, had little to sympathize with or fear. Their reasons varied – from economic ties with Moscow to ideological non-alignment and skepticism of Western

interventions – but a common denominator was that they did not perceive Russia's war as their problem. For many, the Ukraine conflict was seen through a distant prism of great-power rivalry, eliciting little personal empathy for Ukrainians (sometimes tempered by perceptions of Western double standards) and little sense of imminent threat to their own national security. Within NATO/EU, there is only one state that might fit this category: Hungary. Hungary had relatively close relationship with its neighbor Ukraine. However, a series of events would see the two drift apart. For example, a Ukrainian reform forcing Ukrainian schools to require Ukrainian teaching (obviously aimed at Russian speakers) in 2017 which would affect the predominantly Hungarian speaking region in Ukraine causing a major rift between the two. A military base dispute, Hungarian passport distribution among Hungarian minority in Ukraine, and alleged election interference all added to the tension between the two. It is safe to say, by 2022, Hungary has shed much of its empathy with Ukraine. On the other hand, given the historic animosity and violence between Hungary and the USSR, it can be argued to have a strong fear of Russia, however, its borders are still far away from Russia and unless Russia annexes the entirety of Ukraine and still have the will to expand, it is possible to group Hungary in the Low x Low category.

Table 11 Typology Table for Ukraine 2014

	High Threat	Low Threat
	Poland, Baltics, Georgia	**U.S., U.K., Canada, France, Germany, Hungary**
High Empathy	Shared historical trauma, democratic aspiration	Democratic solidarity, global norms, stability
	Existential fear of being "next"	No direct security risk
	Prediction: Strong reaction	**Prediction: Moderate/limited reaction**
	Turkey, Azerbaijan	**Japan, South Korea, Armenia, China, Global South**
Low Empathy	Historical rivalry, competition with Georgia	No strong cultural, political, or economic ties to Georgia (hostility in Armenia)
	Fear of Russian expansion	No direct or indirect security fear of Russia
	Prediction: moderate/limited reaction	**Prediction: weak reaction**

Table 12 Typology Table for Ukraine 2022

	High Threat	Low Threat
	Poland, Baltics, Georgia, U.K., U.S., Canada, France, Germany, Eastern Europe	**South Korea, Japan**
High Empathy	Shared historical trauma, democratic aspiration	Democratic solidarity, global norms, stability
	Existential fear of being "next"	No direct security risk
	Prediction: Strong reaction	**Prediction: Moderate/limited reaction**
	Turkey, Azerbaijan	**Hungary, Armenia, China, Global South**
Low Empathy	Historical rivalry, competition with Georgia	No strong cultural, political, or economic ties to Georgia (hostility in Armenia)
	Shared separatist challenges, fear of Russian revisionism	No direct or indirect security fear of Russia
	Prediction: moderate/limited reaction	**Prediction: weak reaction**

This typological matrix is useful for understanding how 2014 and 2022 differed as international engagement climates. In 2014, many Western states could be characterized as either High Empathy/Low Threat (caring about Ukraine but seeing the showdown as peripheral to their

security) or Low Empathy/Low Threat (caring little and not feeling endangered). Only a narrower front line of states was High/High "solidarity hawks." By contrast, in 2022 a far greater number of democracies converged in the High/High quadrant – they felt both a moral imperative and a security imperative to engage. Even those not quite in High/High moved closer to that corner than before. This overall shift meant that the center of gravity of transatlantic opinion moved toward the High/High pole in 2022, enabling a far stronger and more unified third-party engagement. Meanwhile, those in the Low/Low quadrant (primarily outside the West) remained on the sidelines or continued their balancing acts.

4.3.2 Evidence for Hypothesis 1: Comparative Patterns of International Attention towards Ukraine

In this section, quantitative event data is used to compare international attention to Ukraine during the 2014 Crimea crisis and the 2022 full-scale invasion. We again draw on the Integrated Crisis Early Warning System (ICEWS) dataset for both periods and supplement it with POLECAT data for 2022 (an online media analytics platform spanning 2018–2024). POLECAT claims to be a more updated version of ICEWS. These sources track how often and to what extent third-party countries engaged with or mentioned Ukraine, serving as proxies for "attention."

Figure 22 International Relations Network in 2014

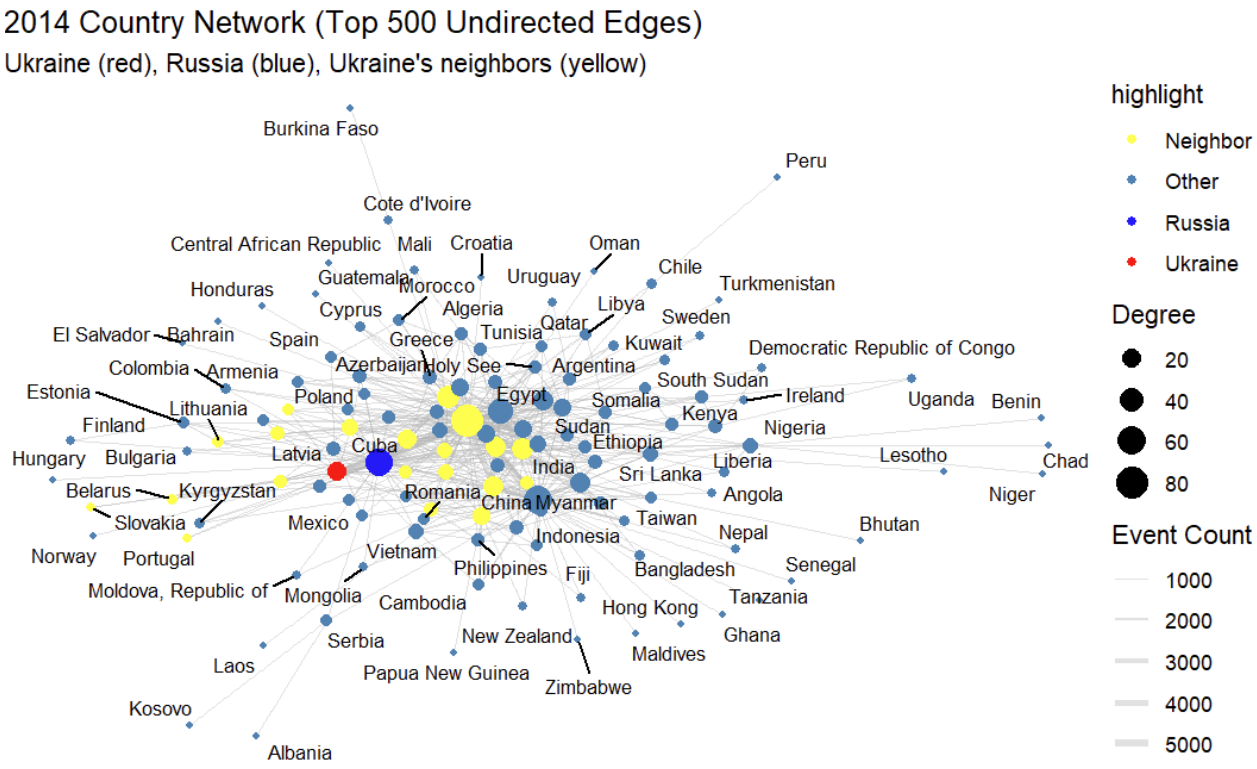
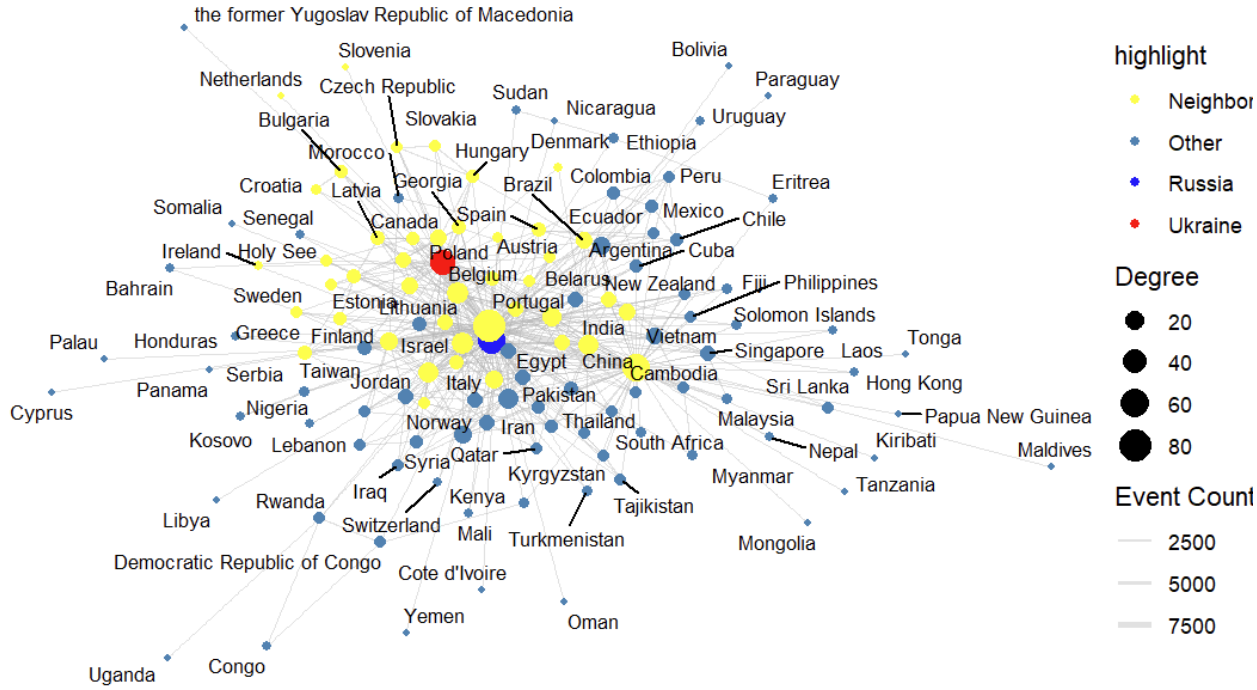


Figure 23 International Relations Network in 2022



Figures above compare Ukraine's position in the global interaction network (top 500 undirected edges by event count). Nodes are countries (Ukraine in red, Russia in blue, Ukraine's first-order neighbors in yellow); node size reflects degree (number of distinct partners), and edge shade reflects edge strength (event counts).

Two changes are evident. First, Ukraine's immediate network neighborhood (nodes that have a direct edge linking them to Ukraine) expands in 2022: the number of yellow nodes increases, indicating that more countries formed direct, top-tier ties with Ukraine. Substantively, this reflects the wider circle of governments issuing statements, delivering aid, coordinating sanctions, and engaging diplomatically once the war escalated. Second, Ukraine's embeddedness in the network core deepens. In 2022, Ukraine sits amid denser, higher-degree clusters—especially among European and trans-Atlantic partners—signaling more ties to influential hubs rather than peripheral actors. The visual thickening of edges around Ukraine further suggests stronger interaction volumes with those partners.

Figure 24 ICEWS Ukraine Network Centrality 2008-2022

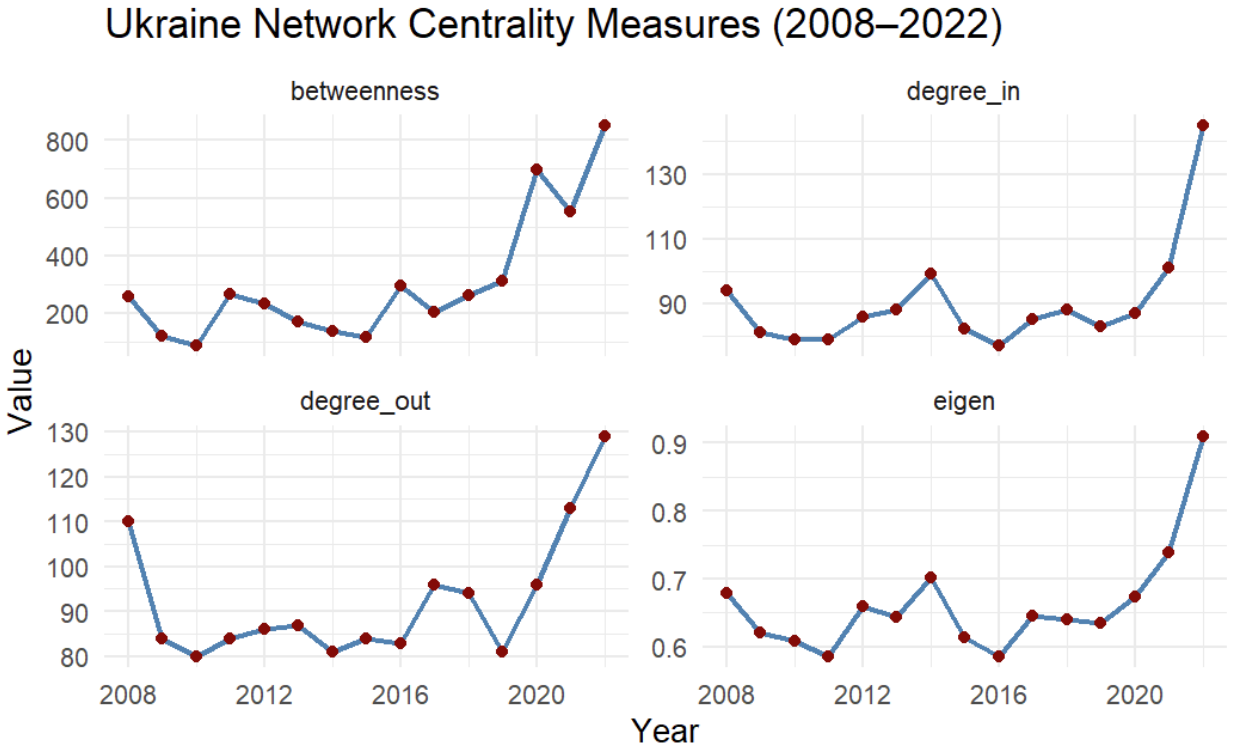
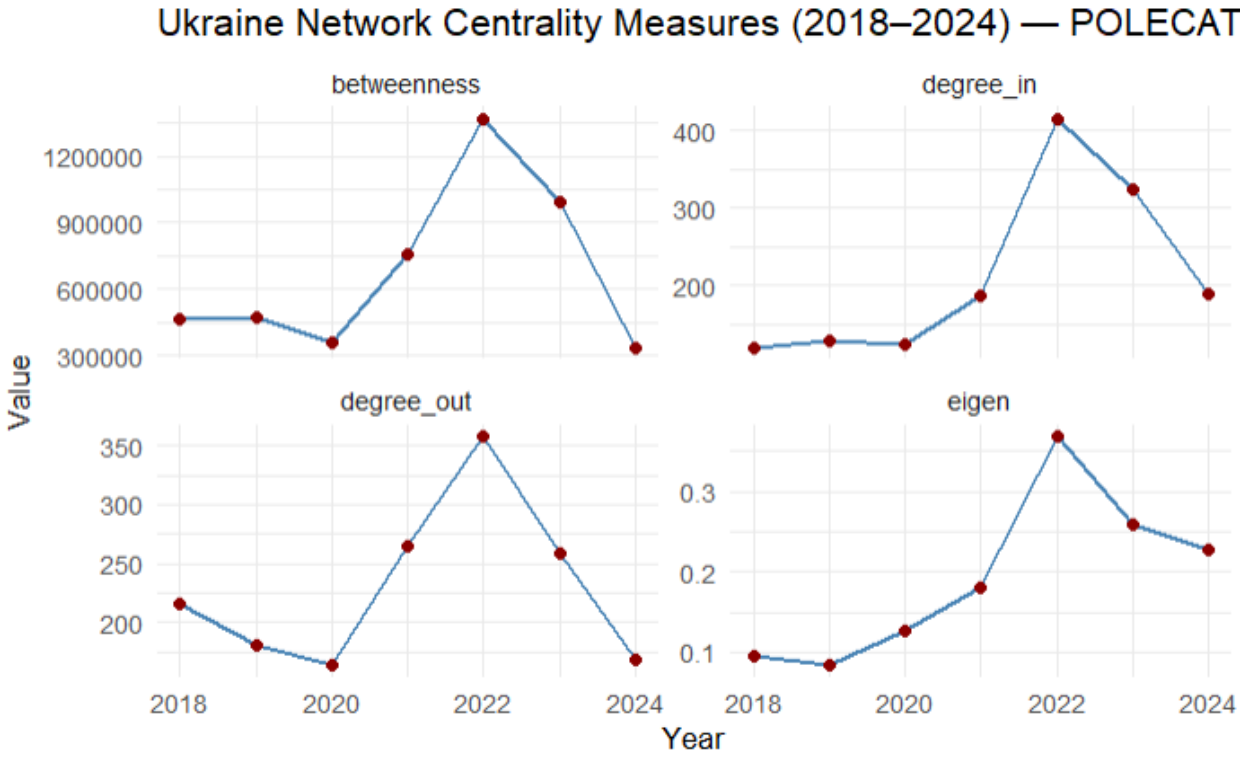


Figure 25 POLECAT Ukraine Network Centrality 2018-2024



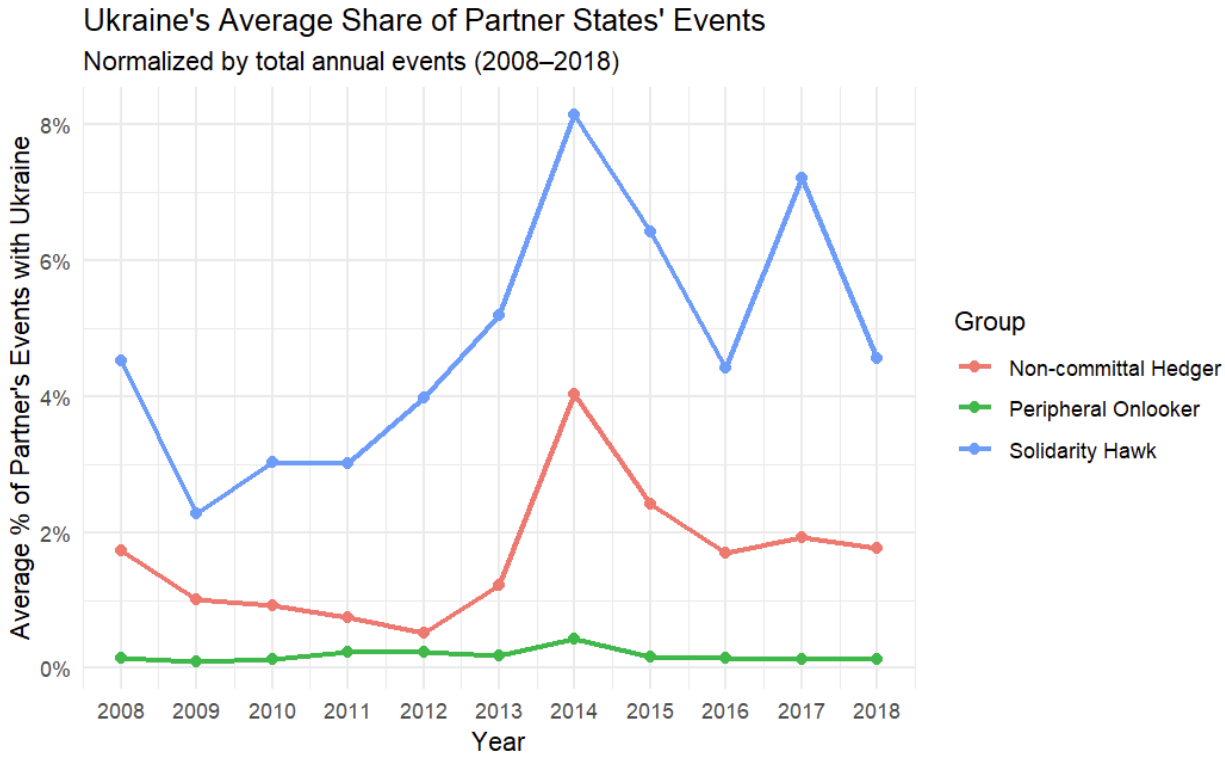
Tracking Ukraine's annual centrality among the top 500 undirected edges shows two distinct inflection points. In 2014, only eigenvector and in-degree register modest increases, consistent with Ukraine becoming better connected to influential hubs and receiving more inbound interactions. By contrast, betweenness and out-degree remain near trough levels. Substantively, the 2014 crisis produced a narrow coalition centered on a few Western hubs (EU institutions, the U.S., key European capitals), with much of the crisis management running through those hubs rather than through Kyiv. Ukraine drew attention, but it did not function as a broker between otherwise weakly connected blocs, and much of the interaction volume was incoming (monitoring, statements, assistance) rather than outbound diplomatic outreach by Ukraine itself.

In 2022, both data sources—ICEWS (2008–2022) and POLECAT (2018–2024)—show simultaneous spikes across all four metrics. The sharp rise in betweenness indicates that Ukraine became a conduit connecting multiple coalitions (sanctions, security assistance, refugee coordination, multilateral diplomacy). The jumps in in-degree and eigenvector reflect broadened ties to highly connected hubs (U.S., EU, UK, NATO members and partners), while the rise in out-degree captures Kyiv's intensified, wide-angle outreach to dozens of capitals. POLECAT further shows post-2022 tapering—a normalization from the wartime peak.

Next, I put my typology to the test and find if indeed the different combinations of Empathy levels and Threat levels matter for a state's attention given to Ukraine. For analytical clarity, states are grouped by their empathy–threat typology (Solidarity Hawk, Non-committal Hedger, and Peripheral Onlooker). It is important to note that group membership is time-specific – a country's classification in 2014 may differ in 2022 due to shifts in perception (e.g., several NATO members that were Non-committal Hedger in 2014 became Solidarity Hawk by 2022).

This regrouping means the composition of each category is not identical across the two crises, a caveat to direct comparisons. Nonetheless, the relative patterns of attention across the four typology groups in 2014 and 2022 reveal a consistent trend in line with Hypothesis 1.

Figure 26 ICEWS Ukraine's Average Share of Partner States' Events 2008-2018[4]

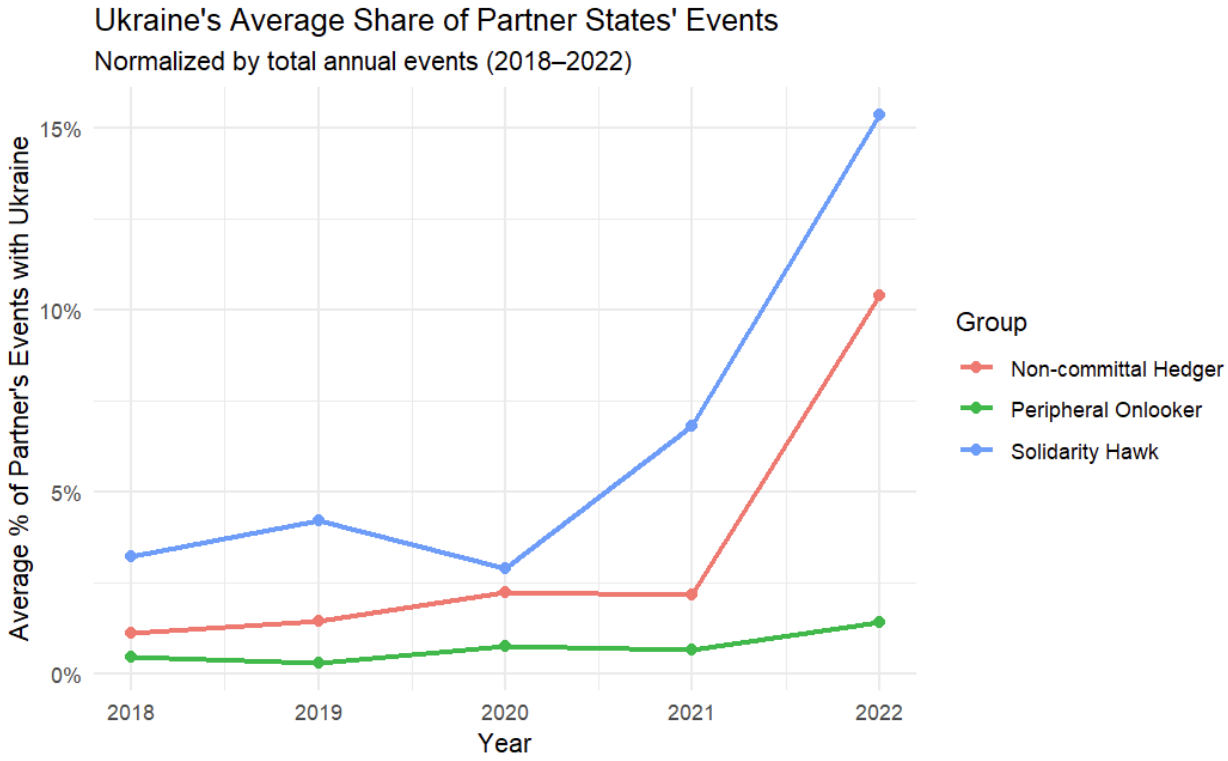


In the 2014 Crimea crisis, we observe that states with both strong empathy for Ukraine and high threat perception from Russia were the most attentive to the conflict. According to ICEWS event records from that period, the countries fitting this Solidarity Hawk profile – notably Eastern European democracies like Poland, the Baltic states, and Georgia – devoted disproportionate focus to Ukraine's plight. By contrast, Non-committal Hedger (for example,

[4] For typology in 2014, the following grouping is used for this graph:
Solidarity Hawk: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Georgia; **Non-committal Onlooker**: U.S., U.K., Canada, France, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Austria, Switzerland, Portugal, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Germany, Hungary, Australia, New Zealand; Azerbaijan, Turkey;
Peripheral Onlooker: Armenia, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Argentina, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, Egypt, Columbia, Chile, Peru.

many Western European countries) showed more moderate engagement. Their attention, while significant, was less intense than that of the frontline states. The Peripheral Onlooker group – encompassing many countries in the Global South – exhibited minimal concern for the Crimea crisis. For these states, neither a personal stake nor a strong identification with Ukraine was present, and Ukraine-related events made up only a negligible fraction of their international activity. Overall, the 2014 pattern already hinted that those who both cared about Ukraine's cause and feared Russian aggression gave the issue far greater weight than others, consistent with the expectations of Hypothesis 1.

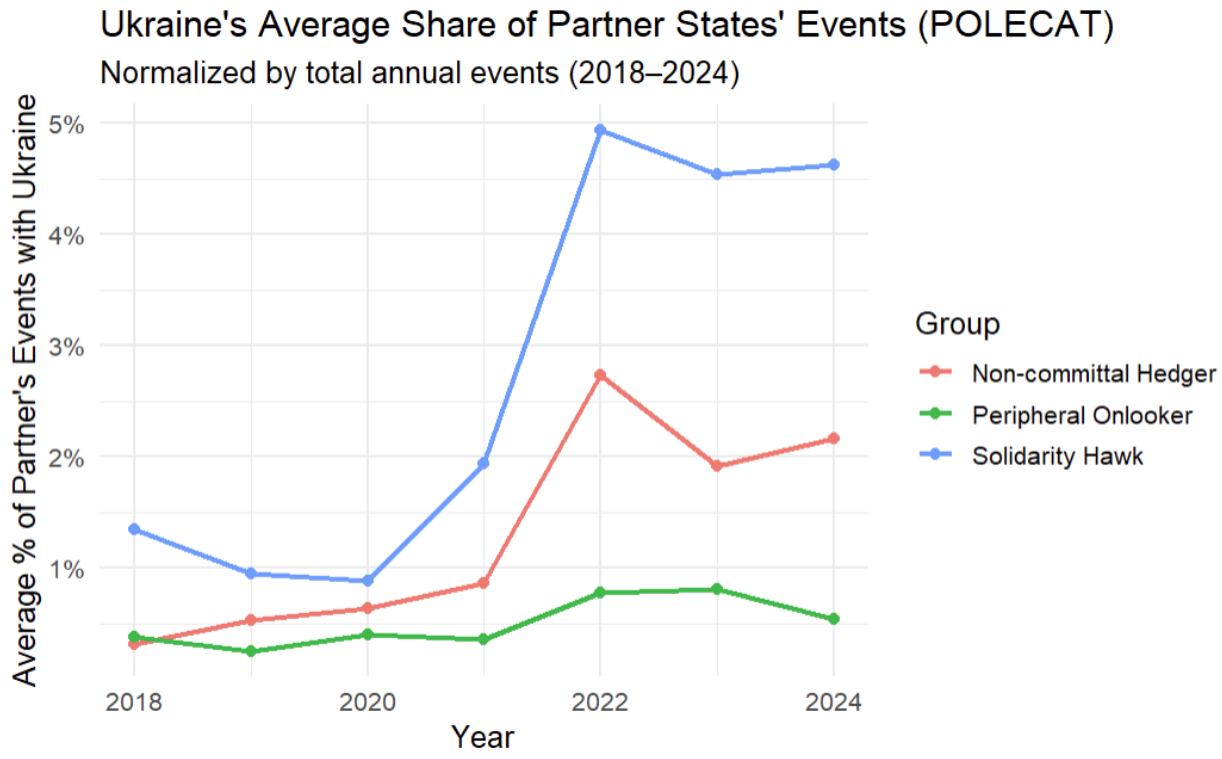
Figure 27 ICEWS: Ukraine's Average Share of Partner States' Events 2018-2022[5]



[5] For typology in 2022, the new grouping is used for the ICEWS and POLECAT graph:
Solidarity Hawk: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Georgia; U.S., U.K., Canada, France, Sweden, Norway, Germany **Non-committal Onlooker**: Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Austria, Switzerland, Portugal, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Hungary, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan; Azerbaijan, Turkey; **Peripheral Onlooker**: Armenia, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Argentina, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Egypt, Columbia, Chile, Peru, Hungary.

The full-scale invasion of 2022 triggered a far more dramatic surge in global attention to Ukraine, but importantly, the rank-ordering of typology groups remained the same as in 2014. Solidarity Hawk overwhelmingly dominated the response. ICEWS data show that in 2022 these countries devoted an unprecedented portion of their interactions to Ukraine – on average around 15% of their total recorded international events involved Ukraine, a three-fold jump from the pre-war baseline. This means that a significant share of High/High states' foreign policy discourse and activity became Ukraine-centric during the invasion. The Non-committal Hedger group also increased its attention to Ukraine in 2022, though not nearly to the same extent. Many of these states (e.g., geographically distant democracies in Western Europe or Asia) consistently voiced solidarity and participated in diplomatic efforts, resulting in roughly 10% of their international engagements referencing Ukraine in 2022. Finally, the Low/Low states unsurprisingly stayed the least engaged of all: Ukraine occupied only a trivial sliver (approximately 1–2%) of their international interactions during the 2022 crisis. In sum, just as in 2014, those states that emotionally identified with Ukraine's struggle (especially those who also felt directly imperiled by Russia) emerged as the most attentive and reactive to the conflict, whereas those who lacked such identification were largely indifferent, even when facing broader security jitters. And this result is also corroborated from the other data source: POLECAT (see figure below).

Figure 28 POLECAT: Ukraine's Average Share of Partner States' Events 2018-2024



In summary, the comparative evidence strongly supports Hypothesis 1. Across two very different Russian aggression episodes eight years apart, third-party states in the Solidarity Hawks consistently exhibited the highest levels of attention to Ukraine, dedicating a greater share of their interactions and discourse to the conflict than any other group. Non-committal Hedger states showed moderate engagement in both cases, reinforcing that one axis alone can generate substantial (if less intense) attention. These patterns underscore a key insight of the empathy–threat framework: international attention is maximized when observers both identify with the victim and feel directly menaced by the aggressor. Consistence between 2014 and 2022 in this regard highlights the enduring importance of those dual motivations in focusing third-party attention on foreign crises. These results also highlight a notable difference between the two episodes: the 2022 invasion captured far more global attention than the 2014 Crimea crisis, both in absolute levels of engagement and in the breadth of countries involved. This amplification

suggests that empathy and threat are cumulative over time – the precedents of Russian actions in 2008 and 2014 appear to have deepened both identification with Ukraine and perceptions of Russia as a systemic danger, priming states to respond with heightened urgency in 2022. The unprecedented scale and intensity of violence in the full-scale invasion further magnified this effect, making Ukraine's plight not only more visible but also more compelling for third-party actors across the globe.

4.3.3 Evidence for Hypothesis 2: Support for Ukraine Across Two Periods

Hypothesis 2 posits that external support for Ukraine during the 2014 Crimea crisis and the 2022 full-scale invasion varied systematically with observers' empathy for Ukraine and their perceived threat from Russia. In line with this expectation, states classified as Solidarity Hawks provided the most robust support to Ukraine, "mixed" typology states offered more moderate or conditional backing, and peripheral onlookers showed minimal support. The following analysis documents concrete examples of third-party support – from sanctions and military aid to diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives – in both 2014 and 2022, illustrating these contrasts. (Notably, the focus here is on affirmative support for Ukraine's cause, such as aid and solidarity actions, rather than merely anti-Russian rhetoric.) As a caveat, the composition of each typological group shifted between 2014 and 2022 – for example, several NATO countries that were High Empathy/Low Threat in 2014 had moved into the High/High category by 2022. These membership changes are acknowledged when comparing support levels, but the overall pattern remains: those who both cared about Ukraine's plight and felt directly menaced by Russia emerged as the strongest supporters across both crises, whereas those lacking empathy and threat perception invested little in helping Ukraine.

4.3.3.1 Solidarity Hawk: Strongest Support for Ukraine

States that identified closely with Ukraine's plight and felt directly endangered by Russian aggression – the high-empathy, high-threat group – proved to be Kyiv's staunchest supporters in both 2014 and 2022. In 2014, this group was relatively small but vocal. It consisted primarily of Russia's nearby neighbors with deep historical ties to Ukraine and acute fear of Moscow's revanchism. Poland, the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), and Georgia epitomized this category. Russia's seizure of Crimea and instigation of conflict in Donbas resonated with these countries on both moral and security grounds. Accordingly, their governments pushed for forceful responses and took bold supportive actions. For instance, diplomatically, Poland and the Baltics were among the earliest to condemn Moscow's moves and advocate strong sanctions within the EU and NATO. They consistently urged that Russia be punished for violating Ukraine's sovereignty; indeed, Russia's retaliatory blacklist in 2015 disproportionately targeted politicians from Poland, the Baltic States, the UK, and Sweden – i.e., countries most firmly in favor of sanctions (Russell, 2016). Materially, some high-threat neighbors even provided military aid at a time when most other states hesitated. Lithuania was notably the first country to supply Ukraine with lethal weaponry in the wake of Crimea: as early as 2014, Vilnius began delivering surplus ammunition and arms to assist Kyiv's defense. The Lithuanian government framed this as a message that "Ukraine is not alone," backing those words with deeds. High-threat neighbors also extended humanitarian support – for example, Lithuania took in wounded Ukrainian soldiers for medical treatment and sent military instructors to help train Ukraine's forces (Reuters, 09/03/2016). These frontline states saw Ukraine's fight as intertwined with their own security and independence. The dire outlook in 2014 galvanized Poland, the Baltics, and others to treat Ukraine's cause as their own. Through outspoken

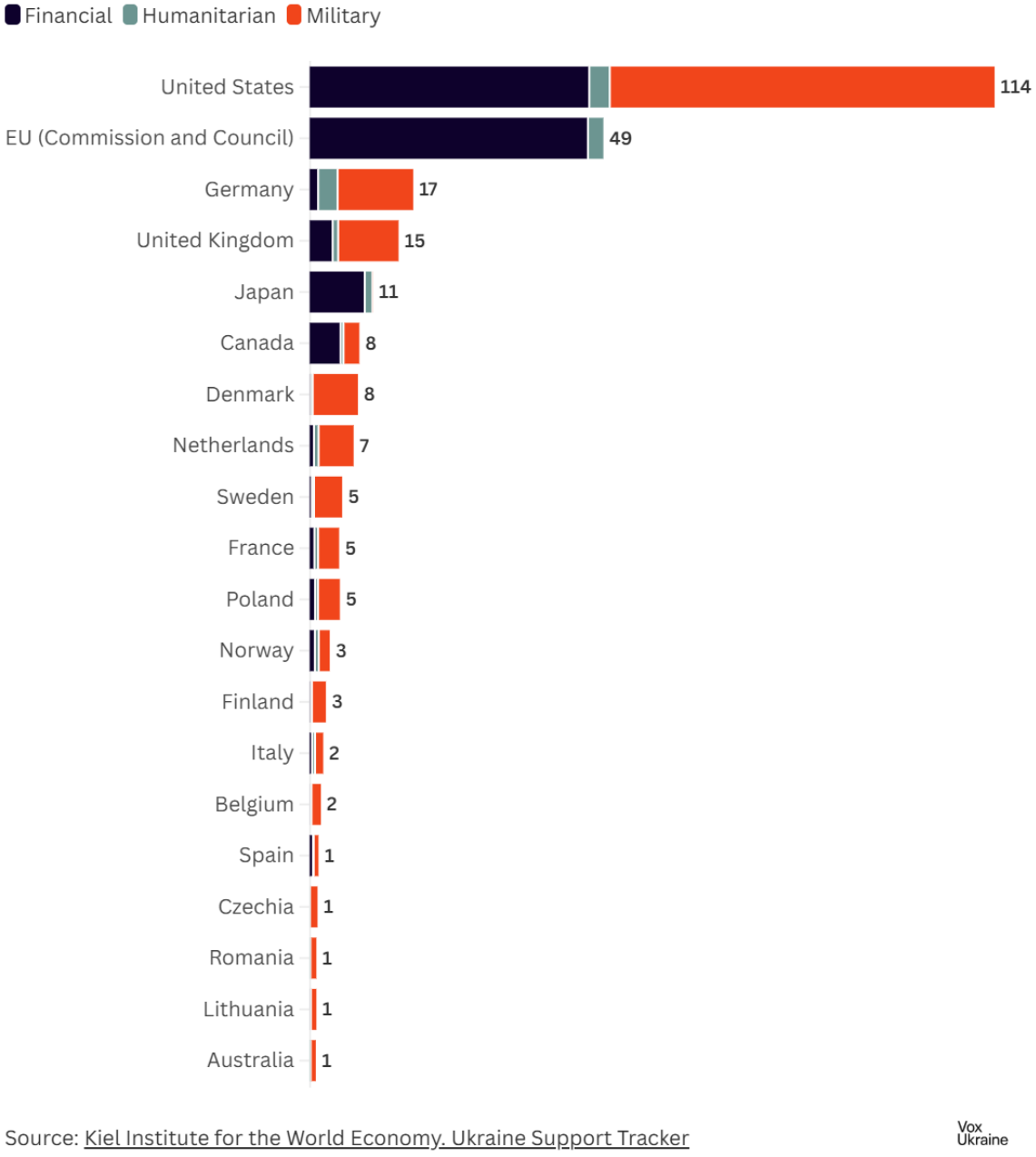
diplomacy, early aid shipments, and societal solidarity (from rallies in Warsaw and Tallinn to charity drives in Vilnius), the Solidarity Hawks in 2014 demonstrated an unequivocal commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty.

By 2022, the Solidarity Hawk coalition both expanded and intensified its support. Russia's full-scale invasion dramatically validated the fears of Eastern Europe and convinced many previously ambivalent actors to see Moscow as a direct threat. In between the years, more aggressive Ukrainian outreach, and extensive coverage of the continued Russian instigation both through traditional and social media have moved the globe to empathize with Ukraine. Thus, countries on NATO's entire eastern flank – from Estonia and Poland down to Romania – were undeniably in the Solidarity Hawk camp by 2022, now joined by powers like the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and the Nordic states. These states not only empathized with Ukraine as a fellow democracy under attack but also perceived Putin's war as a frontal menace to European security and the rules-based order. Consequently, their support reached unprecedented levels in 2022. High/High governments took the lead in orchestrating tough sanctions and providing military aid. For example, the Baltic countries and Poland, who had consistently pressed for punishing Moscow since 2014, quickly pushed the EU and NATO toward unity on measures like cutting off Russian banks and embargoing key exports. They themselves imposed sweeping restrictions and moved to end imports of Russian energy despite the economic costs, underscoring a willingness to bear burdens for Ukraine's sake. Militarily, Solidarity Hawks supplied arms on an unimaginable scale in the earlier crisis. The United States and United Kingdom, which in 2014 had limited their assistance to non-lethal support, by 2022 poured in anti-tank missiles, air-defense systems, and billions in weaponry for Ukraine. Poland, Canada, and the Baltic states – all high-threat perceivers – likewise sent substantial hardware

(from Polish tanks to Baltic Stinger missiles) even in the war's early weeks. Notably, Poland and the Czech Republic facilitated the transfer of Soviet-designed heavy weapons to Ukraine, acting as logistical hubs for allied arms deliveries (Bryjka, 2022). This robust military aid reflected both empathy and a hard security interest in blunting Russian aggression.

High/High leaders also made powerful symbolic gestures of solidarity. In March 2022, as Russian troops encircled Kyiv, the prime ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia undertook a risky train trip into the embattled capital – the first foreign leaders to visit Ukraine after the invasion – to personally assure President Zelensky of their unwavering support. President Zelensky, noting that many diplomats had fled Kyiv, praised these leaders who "were not afraid of anything and are more afraid of our fate," a testament to their extraordinary solidarity (Reuters, 03/15/2022). Beyond governments, publics in Solidarity Hawk countries displayed passionate support in 2022: Eastern European societies opened their doors to millions of Ukrainian refugees and rallied civil society aid. Poland alone has hosted around 1 million refugees, providing them with extensive assistance worth an estimated €30 billion– a humanitarian commitment emblematic of deep empathy fused with an acute sense of shared threat. Germany had spent a total of €35.4 billion and took in 1.2 million refugees (Balytska, 2025).

Figure 29 Top 20 countries by level of aid to Ukraine from January 24, 2022, to December 31, 2024

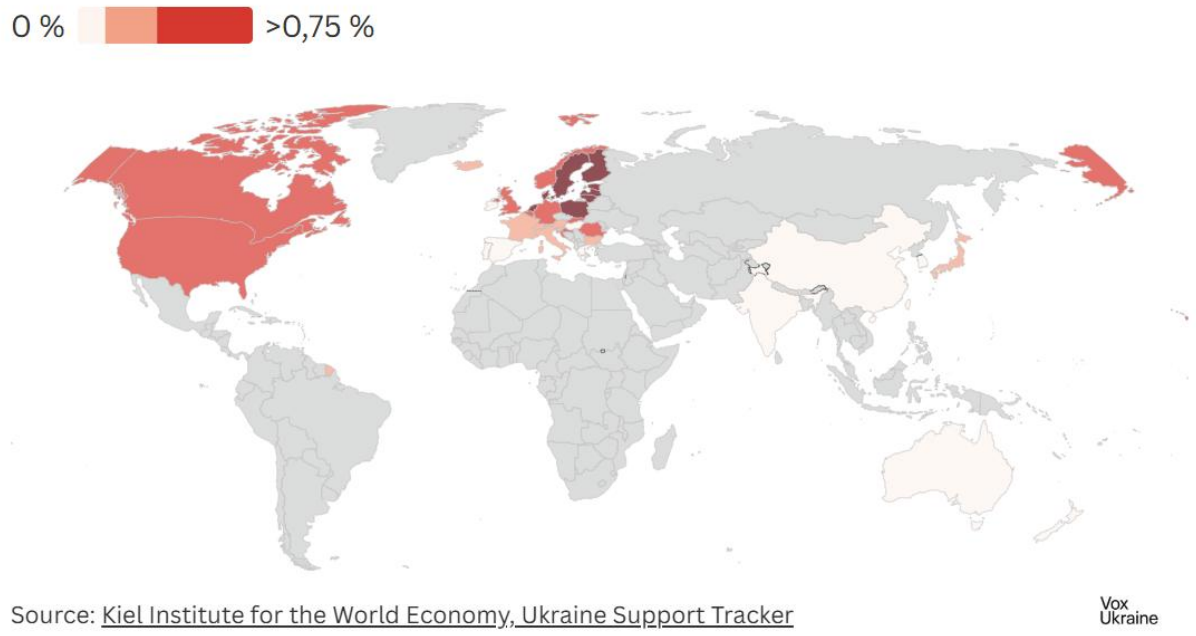


The distribution at the top of the bar chart (United States, EU institutions, Germany, United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, Poland, the Nordics, and the Baltics) largely matches my predictive High-Empathy × High-Threat (H/H) bloc—especially among Central-Eastern and Northern European states. A few Non-committal Hedger donors (Japan, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, Australia) also appear within the top twenty, but—Japan aside—their absolute

commitments are comparatively modest. What is most notable is that several Central-Eastern and Northern European states—such as Poland, Denmark, Finland, Romania, Lithuania, and Czechia—rank near the top even in raw euros/dollars despite their smaller economies. The United States is the expected outlier in absolute volume owing to fiscal capacity and alliance leadership.

Aid composition reinforces this pattern. Most European sovereign donors allocate a majority share to military assistance, consistent with a threat-centric response, while EU institutions are weighed toward financial packages (macro-financial and budgetary instruments). Part of the humanitarian burden is recorded domestically by European states for refugee support or channeled via EU mechanisms, which lowers the humanitarian share in individual member-state bars. The United States contributes large volumes of both military and humanitarian aid. Japan is an outlier in composition—minimal military assistance due to legal and doctrinal constraints—concentrating on humanitarian and financial support, as predicted by its non-committal Hedger profile.

Figure 30 Geographical distribution of total financial, humanitarian, and military aid to Ukraine from January 24, 2022, to December 31, 2024 (as a percentage of the country's GDP)



The intensity map (aid as % of donor GDP) aligns tightly with the typology: the Baltics, Poland, the Nordics, and several Central European donors are shaded darkest, exceeding ≈ 0.75% of GDP—a striking fiscal effort. By contrast, out-of-region democracies (e.g., Japan, Australia) and much of Western Europe beyond the Nordics are lighter, consistent with High-Empathy × Lower-Threat profiles. However, it is worth noting that empathetic links and threat perception are not equivalent to geographic closeness. Notice that quite a few states near Ukraine are not highlighted in this map: Slovakia, Greece, Turkey, the Caucasus, etc.

In sum, the Solidarity Hawk group became the backbone of Ukraine's international support in 2022, just as in 2014, but with its ranks broader and its actions – sanctions, arms, humanitarian help – far more intensive. Countries that both cared about Ukraine's fate and felt endangered by Russian expansionism led the charge in marshaling a robust Western response to the invasion.

4.3.3.2 Non-committal Hedger: Moderate Support

Observers falling into the "mixed" categories – those high on one dimension (empathy or threat) but low on the other – exhibited moderate and sometimes nuanced support for Ukraine. As with the Georgia case, two sub-groups can grouped together here: High Empathy × Low Threat states (for example, distant liberal democracies that sympathized strongly with Ukraine's plight but did not feel directly endangered by the conflict) versus Low Empathy × High Threat states (those uneasy about Russia's actions but lacking a strong identification with Ukraine due to different interests or values). Both types aided or voiced backing, yet generally in a more restrained or selective manner than the Solidarity Hawks. Crucially, many countries in the mixed camp in 2014 shifted to the High x High category by 2022 as their empathy and threat perceptions rose, altering the composition of this group. Meanwhile, some new actors (especially in other regions) emerged as empathetic supporters without being directly threatened.

The net result is that "mixed" typology support grew somewhat more numerous in 2022 but still fell short of the solidarity displayed by the Solidarity Hawk states.

In 2014, numerous Western democracies and U.S. allies worldwide sympathized with Ukraine's victimization, even though they felt little personal security risk from the Crimea crisis. Empathy stemmed from shared democratic ideals and revulsion at the violation of a sovereign country's borders, rather than from fear of being Moscow's next target. For example, major West European powers like France, Germany, and the UK, as well as overseas allies like Canada, Japan, and Australia, all condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea and affirmed Ukraine's territorial integrity. Their governments backed Ukraine diplomatically and economically – but with some caution and limits reflective of lower threat urgency. In the EU, Western European leaders took the lead in mediating an end to acute fighting in 2014: notably, French President

Nicolas Sarkozy brokered a six-point ceasefire in the Donbas in September 2014 (the Minsk Protocol), and Germany later helped negotiate the follow-up Minsk II accord in early 2015. These were meaningful acts aimed at stabilizing Ukraine. The European Union also launched an observer mission (the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission, strongly supported by the West) and convened donor conferences – by October 2008 (after the Georgia war) and similarly after 2014, Western European states were among dozens of donors pledging billions in reconstruction and economic aid to help the affected country. In Ukraine's case, the EU and IMF assembled large financial support packages after 2014: for instance, the EU offered Kyiv macro-financial loans and aid as part of a $27 billion international support program. The United States, though geographically removed, likewise demonstrated empathy through substantial economic assistance. President Obama's administration provided a $1 billion loan guarantee to bolster Ukraine's finances in 2014, along with over $300 million in direct aid for governance reform, humanitarian needs, and non-lethal security help. American officials proclaimed solidarity with "the Ukrainian people's choice of democracy" even as Washington stopped short of any military intervention (National Archives and Records Administration, 11/21/2014). Altogether, in 2014 the non-committal hedgers did rally to Ukraine's side, contributed election monitors and aid, and issued ringing statements upholding the international order. However, their support was measured. For example, Western Europe's major powers condemned Moscow and even agreed to modest military reassurance measures for Eastern NATO members, yet they ruled out any direct military aid to Ukraine at that time and were cautious about steps that might escalate confrontation. Germany and France, in particular, pursued a diplomatic balancing act – sanctioning Russia on principle, but also engaging Putin in dialogue (the Normandy Format) and hesitating to arm Ukraine, reflecting their still-low threat perception before 2022. Public

enthusiasm in these countries was likewise more subdued than in Eastern Europe: while people sympathized with Ukraine's plight, the crisis felt distant and abstract to many Western publics in 2014. Thus, the Non-committal Hedger's backing for Ukraine, though significant in legal and economic terms, often lacked the urgency and "all-in" quality seen in the frontline states. It was support in the name of rules and values, tempered by greater caution and less emotional investment.

In 2022, many of these same countries experienced a profound shift – as Russia's all-out war shattered earlier complacency, empathy for Ukraine surged and threat perceptions spiked across the West. As a result, several key players no longer remained in the High-Empathy/Low-Threat category, having effectively "upgraded" to Solidarity Hawk. Germany and France, for example, came to view Putin's onslaught as a generational security threat to Europe, not merely a distant conflict. This translated into far more assertive support: by mid-2022 Germany overturned decades of policy by approving lethal arms exports to Ukraine and boosting its defense spending, and France likewise ramped up military aid (including advanced artillery) (Bryjka, 2022). Countries like Sweden and Finland – neutral in 2014 and feeling little immediate danger then – were so alarmed by 2022 that they not only gave material support to Ukraine but even abandoned neutrality to seek NATO membership, a dramatic indication of their new threat assessment.

Even so, there remained a set of states in 2022 that felt only strongly about one of the two axes. These continued to fit the Non-Committal Hedger profile and generally offered moderate, non-military support. Spain and Portugal, for instance, unequivocally condemned Russia and backed EU sanctions out of normative commitment to international law but given their distance from Russia they did not perceive an existential danger to themselves. Their contributions came

mainly in diplomacy and humanitarian aid rather than frontline military aid. Likewise, Japan – a democracy with a principled stance against aggression but focused on security challenges in East Asia. Tokyo, however, remained removed from the European theater and thus limited its involvement to financial assistance and imposing penalties on Moscow (for example, restricting technology exports and freezing Russian assets) rather than any direct security assistance. Other distant democracies such as Australia and New Zealand followed a similar pattern: high moral support – including generous humanitarian aid and sanctions alignment – but felt naturally low personal threat, which meant no immediate military stake. In short, by 2022 the High-Empathy countries that still lacked a personal threat incentive did step up their support compared to 2014, under the weight of global outrage. They contributed to Ukraine's war effort in important ways (funding, refugee assistance, training programs, etc.), yet often behind the scenes or in non-lethal domains. Their backing, while heartfelt, usually lacked intensity.

4.3.3.3 Peripheral Onlooker: Minimal Support

States with little identification with Ukraine and no perceived self-threat offered scant assistance in both 2014 and 2022. This cluster—largely in the global South plus authoritarian partners of Moscow—treated the conflict as a distant European dispute. In 2014, most avoided taking sides: many abstained or were absent in the UNGA Crimea vote, issued generic calls for restraint, and adopted no sanctions. China exemplified legalistic neutrality (non-recognition of annexation yet no criticism of Russia), while major non-Western democracies (India, Brazil, South Africa) and many Middle Eastern and African governments stayed disengaged.

The 2022 invasion raised rhetorical condemnation (e.g., a larger UNGA majority), but practical support from Low/Low actors remained limited. Most declined sanctions and refrained from military or substantial economic aid to Kyiv; several deepened economic ties with Russia

(e.g., energy purchases and coordination). Brazil and South Africa maintained neutrality; Gulf states prioritized oil policy over alignment; and a few regimes actively aided Moscow (e.g., Iranian drones; Belarusian facilitation).

Overall, consistent with Hypothesis 2, absent empathy or direct threat, these states provided minimal, conditional, or purely symbolic support—well short of the commitments seen among High-Empathy/High-Threat actors.

4.3.3.4 Summary Table for International Support towards Ukraine in 2014 and 2022

Table 13 Support for Ukraine in 2014 and 2022

Typology group	Illustrative members	Expected support profile (H2)	Observed support, 2014	Observed support, 2022
Solidarity Hawk	2014: Poland, Baltics, Georgia 2022: Poland, Baltics, Romania, UK, U.S., Canada, Nordics, etc.	Timely, substantive aid and support	Immediate supportive statements and sanctions, high profile visits, material aid (including military)	Heavy weaponry, training on massive scale, high-risk visits to wartime Kyiv in person, outsized humanitarian aid, refugee support.
Non-committal Hedger	2014: Western Europe, N. America, the Nordics 2022: e.g., Spain, Ireland, Japan, S. Korea	Limited, nuanced, and cautious support	Humanitarian and economic aid, slower but firm supportive statements, pushed negotiations	Humanitarian and Economic aid on a larger scale, slower but firm supportive statements
Peripheral Onlooker	China, India, Belarus, Armenia, Africa, Middle East, Latin America	Little to no support	Generic calls for peaceful solution, abstaining from UN votes.	Generic calls for peaceful solutions, abstaining from UN votes.

To synthesize the above findings, Table 13 compares the level of support for Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 across the three typological groups. In both periods, the solidarity hawks far outpaced all others, consistently providing the most comprehensive and sustained assistance to Ukraine. Non-committal Hedger supporters offered more qualified backing, but their average level of engagement rose notably in 2022 as several key states shifted into the high-threat camp, transforming the composition of the Solidarity Hawk group. By contrast, Peripheral Onlooker states remained largely disengaged, with minimal change over time. The most consequential

transformation between the two crises is this reconfiguration of the typological landscape: the migration of states from mixed typologies into High/High status effectively shifted the entire center of gravity of international support toward Ukraine. Coupled with the unprecedented scale and intensity of Russia's 2022 invasion, this broadened coalition produced a markedly higher overall volume, diversity, and intensity of support compared to 2014, reinforcing the pattern that empathy and threat in combination are the most powerful drivers of sustained, tangible assistance.

4.3.4 Evidence for Hypothesis 3: Escalating Hostility Toward Russia

Hypothesis 3 posits that escalating third-party hostility toward Russia – manifest in hostile rhetoric, punitive policy measures, and political backlash – is fundamentally driven by variation in observers' empathy for the victim and their perceived threat from Moscow. In line with this expectation, Solidarity Hawk states (those deeply identifying with Ukraine's plight and feeling directly endangered by Russia) mounted the most vehement anti-Russian responses. Such countries unleashed strident condemnations and aggressive policies (from spearheading sanctions to arming Ukraine) and even saw domestic political shifts reflecting heightened anti-Russian sentiment. Observers with "mixed" typologies (Non-committal Hedger) showed more measured hostility – they condemned Moscow and took some countermeasures, but often in a cautious or limited fashion. Meanwhile, Peripheral Onlooker states generally displayed minimal inclination to punish or confront Russia, frequently remaining neutral or even sympathetic to Moscow's narrative. Accordingly, Section 4.3.4 is structured around these three clusters and compares their reactions across the 2014 Crimea crisis and the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The following analysis draws on multiple forms of evidence, including leaders' rhetoric and policy actions, cross-national public opinion polling, and electoral shifts in democratic

states, to demonstrate that empathy and threat perception together best explain the intensity of anti-Russian backlash in both episodes.

4.3.4.1 Solidarity Hawk's Strong Responses to Russian Aggression

States classified as High Empathy × High Threat (H/H) – notably Poland, the Baltic republics (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia), Georgia, the Nordic countries (e.g. Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway) in 2022, as well as the United States and United Kingdom (in 2022) – have exhibited the most vigorous responses to Russian aggression. These countries both strongly identify with Ukraine's plight (empathy) and perceive a direct security threat from Russia's actions. This section analyzes their responses from 2014 (Russia's annexation of Crimea) to 2022 (the full invasion of Ukraine), organized into three areas: policy changes, electoral shifts, and public opinion. Across these dimensions, Solidarity Hawks show an escalating hostility toward Moscow, consistent with their dual high threat perception and solidarity with Ukraine. We compare their trajectory over time and contrast it with more moderate changes in other typological categories.

a. Policy Changes (2014–2022)

Foreign and Defense Policy: From 2014 onward, Solidarity Hawks undertook increasingly hard-liner policies toward Russia, which dramatically intensified after 2022. In the wake of Crimea's annexation in 2014, NATO's eastern members pushed for greater alliance presence: by 2017 NATO had deployed multinational battalion battlegroups in Poland and the Baltics (the Enhanced Forward Presence) led by Western allies. Still, initial measures were limited (no permanent combat units in 2014) (Palavenis, 2025). After Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, NATO fundamentally shifted to a posture of forward defense. At the Madrid summit in June 2022, leaders agreed on "sweeping changes" – scaling up Eastern flank units from

battalions to brigade-sized formations (3,000–5,000 troops per country) and placing 300,000 troops on high readiness. Heavy equipment was pre-positioned near Russia's borders to enable rapid reinforcement, and Russia was explicitly identified as the "main threat" in NATO's new Strategic Concept. Critically, two long-neutral states, Finland and Sweden, reversed decades of nonalignment and formally applied to join NATO in 2022, a historic policy shift made possible by overwhelming public and cross-party support after the invasion (The Guardian, 6/30/2022). In short, Solidarity Hawks moved from cautious reassurance in 2014 to full deterrence and alliance integration by 2022, directly reflecting heightened threat perceptions.

Sanctions and Diplomatic Stances: All Solidarity Hawks took leading roles in international sanctions against Russia. Following the Crimea crisis, they advocated tough EU and G7 measures, and after 2022 they helped craft the most severe sanctions packages to date (e.g., targeting Russian banks, oligarchs, and oil exports). Diplomatically, these countries isolated Moscow: for example, parliaments in Poland and the Baltics passed symbolic resolutions labeling Russia a terrorist or terrorist-sponsoring state. Poland's Sejm in Dec 2022 declared Russia a "state sponsor of terrorism," citing its war crimes in Ukraine and even blaming Moscow for past atrocities like the MH17 shootdown and the 2010 Smolensk crash (Eruygur, 2022). Latvia's Saeima and Estonia's Riigikogu passed similar resolutions in 2022–23 condemning Russia's regime as terrorist (Voice of America, 8/11/2022; Al Jazeera, 10/18/2022). Such acts, while mostly symbolic, underscored the profound hardening of H/H states' official rhetoric toward Russia.

Defense Spending and Military Aid: High threat perception led to surging defense budgets and robust military aid to Ukraine. Many governments had already met or exceeded NATO's 2%-of-GDP defense spending goal by the late 2010s (e.g., the Baltics reached ~2% by

2015–2017 (Palavenis, 2025). After 2022, they accelerated further. Poland, in particular, embarked on an unprecedented military buildup: from spending ~2.7% of GDP in 2022 to a planned 4%+ in 2023–24 – the highest rate in NATO. Warsaw's defense budget is set to reach 4.7% of GDP by 2025, reflecting a "surge…following Russia's 2022 invasion" (Reuters, 10/22/2024). Finland and Denmark likewise announced increases to reach the 2% NATO benchmark (Denmark by 2033 under a post-2022 political accord) (Politico, 06/01/2022). Beyond spending, Solidarity Hawks became leading arms suppliers to Ukraine. Military aid was extremely limited in 2014–2021, when Western leaders feared "escalation" – during that period, no country supplied major weapon systems to Kyiv until 2018, aside from modest exports of munitions by Poland and others. The United States only began sending Javelin anti-tank missiles in 2018, and by late 2021, the only states to have provided Ukraine with complete lethal systems were the US, Poland, Czechia, and Turkey. This cautious approach vanished in 2022. On the eve of the invasion, Solidarity Hawks rushed weapons to Ukraine: Britain flew in 2,000 NLAW anti-tank missiles with trainers by January 20, 2022; the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) tapped their stocks of US-made Javelin and Stinger missiles and obtained Washington's fast-track approval to transfer them to Kyiv. Poland and Czechia shipped ammunition, MANPADS, and spare artillery in that critical week (Christie, 2022). Once the full war began, these states became arsenals for Ukraine. By mid-2022, Poland had donated over two hundred tanks and other heavy equipment; the Baltics contributed howitzers, drones, and training en-masse; the US and UK each committed billions in arms (including HIMARS rockets from the US and advanced anti-air missiles from the UK). The scale and speed of aid from these states represented a complete break with their restrained 2014 posture (Christie, 2022) – a shift made politically feasible by high public empathy and the clear threat of Russian expansionism.

Energy Policy: Energy interdependence with Russia – once an accepted reality – was rapidly unwound after Moscow's aggressions, especially in frontline states. Learning from painful history (Russia's past use of energy extortion), the Baltic countries spent the 2010s diversifying supplies. Lithuania's LNG terminal (opened late 2014) allowed the Baltics to access global gas markets, reducing reliance on Gazprom. As a result, when the 2022 invasion began, they acted decisively: by April 2022, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia had banned all Russian natural gas imports, becoming the first EU countries to do so. This was a *"principled stance"* made possible by their pre-existing alternative infrastructure (Atlantic Council, 2/5/2025). Poland was similarly prepared – having built its own LNG port and a new pipeline to Norway – and refused Moscow's demand to pay for gas in rubles. In response, Gazprom cut off gas to Poland in April 2022, as well as to Finland (and later others), but both countries swiftly shifted to other suppliers (Brookings, 6/18,2024). Denmark, too, saw its main utility cut off by Gazprom in mid-2022 for non-payment in rubles (Politico 6/1/2022); even so, Danish authorities (like others in Europe's H/H camp) chose energy security over Russian gas, absorbing short-term costs to eliminate a strategic vulnerability. By 2023, most Solidarity Hawk states had effectively *zeroed out* Russian oil and gas imports – an astonishing transformation from just a few years prior. This energy decoupling both reinforced and symbolized their hard-liner stance.

In sum, in 2014 and 2022 Solidarity states executed a wholesale realignment of policy: from sanctions and diplomatic isolation of Russia, to major defense buildups and alliance shifts (culminating in NATO enlargement), to cutting economic ties in energy. Each of these changes accelerated markedly after the full-scale invasion, reflecting the combination of acute threat and moral outrage. High empathy for Ukraine's suffering (as fellow democracies or former

Russian/Soviet targets) and high threat perception drove these states to the forefront of counter-Russian action, setting them apart from more hesitant responders.

b. Electoral Shifts: Hawkish Parties Rewarded, Russia-Friendly Forces Punished

Consistent with the above policy consensus, and similar to Taiwan's electoral outcome, voters in many Solidarity Hawk countries moved to reinforce staunchly anti-Russian leaders after 2022. National security and solidarity with Ukraine became salient election issues, and parties deemed ambivalent or soft toward Moscow often suffered backlash. Nowhere was this clearer than in the Baltic states. In Latvia's October 2022 parliamentary election, the long-dominant Russophone party Harmony – which had topped every election for a decade – collapsed and failed to win a single seat, falling below the 5% threshold. The campaign was dominated by the war in Ukraine, and the outcome saw a firmly Atlanticist, pro-Western coalition returned to power. Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš's New Unity party, once languishing in polls, surged to first place after the invasion, as Latvian voters rejected parties associated with Moscow or with pre-war grievances (Auers, 2022).

A similar pattern unfolded in Estonia's March 2023 election: Kaja Kallas, the Prime Minister who had become one of Europe's most outspoken Ukraine supporters, won reelection in a landslide, while her far-right populist challenger (EKRE) lost ground. The vote was explicitly framed by the security crisis, and Kallas's firm stance against Russia (and for aiding Ukraine) resonated strongly with voters (Tanner, 2023). In both cases, parties historically seen as friendly or equivocal toward Russia were marginalized.

Lithuania's electoral cycle further affirmed the pattern: President Gitanas Nausėda, a staunch Russia critic, was re-elected by a landslide in 2024 on the strength of his national-security stewardship and continued support towards Ukraine (France-Presse, 2024).

In the Czech Republic, the January 2023 presidential race was overtly influenced by the war. Retired General Petr Pavel – a former NATO commander running on a pro-Ukraine, pro-NATO platform – defeated populist billionaire Andrej Babiš by a nearly 17-point landslide. The Guardian noted the election was "overshadowed by…the war between Russia and Ukraine," and Babiš even resorted to smearing Pavel as a "warmonger" for supporting military aid to Kyiv. This hard-liner stance did not hurt Pavel; on the contrary, his clear Atlanticist credentials helped mobilize a broad democratic coalition, delivering a "vindication for the pro-western" candidate (Tait, 2023). The result also dealt a blow to the more Russia-tolerant populism that Babiš represented.

In the Nordics, Russia's aggression similarly transformed public and electoral dynamics. The most dramatic shifts were Finland and Sweden's decisions to join NATO – moves enabled by overwhelming parliamentary and public backing in 2022 as mentioned in previous section. In these countries, decades of military non-alignment were overturned within months, as voters and politicians united around the need to deter Russia. Analysts note that the war created a sudden public-opinion break in Finland/Sweden driven by threat perception, rather than a slow evolution since 2014. Meanwhile, Denmark held a landmark referendum in June 2022 to abandon its longstanding EU defense opt-out as mentioned earlier. Spurred directly by Ukraine invasion, Danes voted 66.9% in favor of scrapping the opt-out – a "historic referendum" that ended 30 years of skepticism toward EU defense integration. As Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen declared, "when there is war again on our continent, then you cannot be neutral" (Politico, 6/1/2022). This resounding popular mandate allowed Denmark to join EU security schemes and concurrently increase its defense budget toward NATO's target.

Slovakia, however, proved a crucial exception to the Solidarity Hawk trend. In the September 2023 Slovak elections, three-times former PM Robert Fico (a nationalist-populist) returned to power on an openly Kremlin-friendly platform. Campaigning on promises to "stop military aid to Ukraine" and oppose sanctions, Fico capitalized on war fatigue and economic anxieties. Although his party only won 22% of the total vote, it is still the largest share indicating sizable support for his platform. Upon taking office, he promptly announced that Slovakia "will no longer supply weapons to Ukraine," limiting support to humanitarian aid (Camut, 2023). This stark reversal – unique among NATO's eastern flank – underscores that even in a high-threat region, domestic politics can yield outliers. Still, it is telling that Fico's victory was enabled by Slovakia's lower empathy for Ukraine and more Russia-sympathetic public, distinguishing it from its Baltic and Polish neighbors.

Table 14 Summary Table of European Electoral Shifts related to Ukraine.

Country	Contest & date	Direction of shift on Russia policy
Latvia	Saeima, Oct 2022	Harder line (punishment of Russia-leaning party) *Harmony* excluded from parliament; pro-Western lists advanced
Estonia	Riigikogu, Mar 2023	Harder line (mandate for pro-Ukraine incumbent) Reform Party wins handily; security central in campaign
Czech Republic	Presidency, Jan 2023	Harder line (clear pro-NATO win) Petr Pavel defeats Babiš in race overshadowed by the war
Denmark	EU defense referendum, Jun 2022	Harder line (institutional integration) Opt-out scrapped by large margin, invasion cited as trigger
Finland	NATO accession, 2022–23	Harder line (break with non-alignment) Mass opinion shifts parliamentary mandate for accession
Sweden	NATO accession, 2022–23	Harder line (party reversal, accession) Social Democrats reverse; parliamentary path over referendum
Lithuania	Presidency, May 2024	Harder line (defense-centered reelection) Nausėda reelected amid security concerns over Russia
Slovakia	Parliamentary, Sept 2023	Softer line (aid curtailed) Fico forms government; halts state military aid to Ukraine

The war made security a top voter concern in these states, to the clear benefit of parties with reputations for standing up to Russia. The one major deviation – Slovakia's turn toward Fico's pro-Moscow line – highlights that economic grievances and populist narratives can still

sway a segment of voters, especially where empathy for Ukraine is weaker. Nevertheless, the weight of evidence across Poland, the Baltics, Nordics, and Central Europe supports the expectation that high threat + high empathy = a domestic political mandate for a hard line on Russia. National security salience in Solidarity Hawk states reached its highest point in a generation, and electorates largely aligned their governments accordingly.

c. Public Opinion: Plummeting Views of Russia (2014 vs. 2022)

Finally, underlying these policies and electoral shifts is a remarkable swing in public opinion within Solidarity Hawk societies. Between the 2014 Crimea crisis and the 2022 all-out war, popular attitudes toward Russia went from wary to overwhelmingly hostile in these countries – far more so than in states with lesser threat or empathy. International polling data (e.g., Pew Research Center surveys) illustrate the trend starkly. In Poland, long distrustful of Moscow, unfavorable views of Russia still managed to reach new extremes. In 2010, some 45% of Poles held a favorable view of Russia – a legacy of post-Cold War optimism. After the Crimea invasion in 2014, that collapsed to around 15% favorable. By 2022, Polish sentiment was virtually unanimous: 97% of Poles expressed an unfavorable opinion of Russia (91% “very unfavorable”). Only ~2% of Poles were favorable – essentially a rounding error (Wike et al, 2022). Pew noted this was the single most negative rating in any country surveyed.

Figure 31 Favorable Views of Russia Declines

Sharp decline in favorable views of Russia

*% who have a **favorable** view of Russia*

Highest rating Lowest rating

	'07 %	'09 %	'10 %	'11 %	'12 %	'13 %	'14 %	'15 %	'17 %	'18 %	'19 %	'20 %	'22 %	'20-'22 Change
Italy	37	-	-	-	23	31	20	27	35	37	43	48	14	▼34
Greece	-	-	-	-	61	63	61	-	64	52	58	-	27	▼31*
Poland	34	33	45	35	34	36	12	15	21	22	33	-	2	▼31*
Israel	29	31	-	29	-	21	30	25	35	34	45	-	19	▼26*
South Korea	54	50	40	-	-	53	43	46	36	53	42	39	13	▼26
Spain	35	36	40	46	36	38	18	25	27	24	29	31	8	▼23
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	31	9	▼22
France	35	43	51	53	36	36	26	30	36	30	33	35	14	▼21
Canada	52	51	-	-	-	42	-	26	27	27	30	30	10	▼20
Netherlands	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	15	23	22	7	▼15
Germany	34	42	50	47	33	32	19	27	27	35	35	30	16	▼14
UK	47	45	46	50	38	38	25	18	26	22	26	24	10	▼14
Japan	22	23	30	28	22	27	23	21	26	26	25	18	6	▼12
Australia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18	6	▼12
Sweden	31	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18	19	12	16	5	▼11
U.S.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	7	▼8
Malaysia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	47	-
Singapore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	27	-

*In Greece, Israel and Poland, change is measured from 2019.

Note: Statistically significant changes over time in **bold**. Prior to 2020, U.S. and Australia surveys were conducted by phone. See topline for results.

Source: Spring 2022 Global Attitudes Survey. Q5f.

"International Attitudes Toward the U.S., NATO and Russia in a Time of Crisis"

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Notice that although many states did have a dip in favorable views about Russia, the dip was relatively mild (with some states even having their highest view of Russia rebound and peak between 2014 and 2022), while the 2022 drop were quite drastic.

Sweden showed a similar trajectory. Traditionally non-aligned, Swedes had moderately negative views of Russia in the 2010s; but after 2022 their opinion also hardened to near-total disapproval. 94% of Swedes viewed Russia unfavorably in 2022, with 80% "very unfavorable" (Wike et al, 2022). This represents an enormous shift in Swedish attitudes, helping explain the rapid embrace of NATO – the public came to see Russia as an almost unmitigated threat.

In the United States, attitudes followed the pattern of decline as well, although from a higher baseline of initial favorability. Around 2010, Americans were split (49% favorable toward Russia). Post-2014, favorable views fell to the low twenties% (Simmons et al, 2015). And after the 2022 invasion, just 7% of U.S. adults had a favorable opinion of Russia– effectively a complete collapse in goodwill. A March 2022 poll found 70% of Americans labeling Russia an outright "enemy" of the United States, up from 41% before the war (Wike et al, 4/6/2022).

In conclusion, the Solidarity Hawk cases demonstrate how profoundly a full-scale war and perceived expansionist threat can reshape third-party responses. From 2014 to 2022, these states went from incremental moves to sweeping policy overhauls, from routine politics to security-centric elections, and from skeptical public views to overwhelming anti-Russian sentiment. In each domain, empathy with Ukraine's plight combined with fear of Russian aggression to yield escalating hostility toward Moscow. This pattern of response – drastic but explicable through the dual lenses of threat and empathy – fits squarely within the broader typological framework outlined in this chapter, underlining why H/H states have been the fiercest responders to Russian aggression.

4.3.4.2 Non-committal Hedger: Cautious Rebuke

Not all states responded to Russia's aggression with the unambiguous harshness of the Solidarity Hawk group; many adopted a more cautiously negative stance. In 2014, for instance, Turkey and Azerbaijan exemplified a restrained rebuke. Turkey, despite its historical and cultural ties to Crimea's Tatars, surprised observers by not reacting intensely to Russia's annexation of Crimea. Ankara declined to join Western sanctions and largely maintained normal ties with Moscow, reflecting Turkey's economic interdependence with Russia. At the same time, Turkey did voice support for Ukraine's territorial integrity – it pointedly refused to recognize Russia's

takeover of Crimea – but it kept this criticism at a low key and avoided direct confrontation. Azerbaijan took a similar cautious line. With its own concern over separatism (Nagorno-Karabakh) in mind, Baku quietly sided with the principle of Ukraine's territorial sovereignty – even voting in favor of the March 2014 UN resolution deeming Crimea's referendum illegal– yet it refrained from condemning Moscow's actions too publicly, so as not to anger its powerful northern neighbor. In short, both Turkey and Azerbaijan reacted negatively to Russia's breach of international law, but in a muted fashion and without the sweeping punitive measures seen in Washington or Brussels.

Fast forward to 2022, countries like Turkey and Azerbaijan remained in the Non-committal Hedger category in 2022, continuing their balancing acts. Turkey, a NATO member, explicitly criticized Russia's attack – calling the invasion unacceptable and the annexation of Ukrainian territories a "grave violation of international law" – and it backed its words with selective actions beneficial to Ukraine (most notably, supplying Bayraktar TB2 drones to the Ukrainian army and closing the Black Sea straits to Russian warships). Crucially, however, Ankara still refused to join Western economic sanctions on Russia, seeking to preserve its ties with Moscow even as it helped Ukraine (Reuters, 9/30/2022). This dual approach of condemning Moscow's aggression while avoiding maximal penalties illustrates Turkey's cautious rebuke: Turkey opposed Russia's war aims, but not as unreservedly as the Western alliance did. Azerbaijan took an even more guarded public stance. Baku officially stayed neutral on the war – for example, it abstained on UN General Assembly votes in 2022 that demanded Russia halt its invasion and later suspended Russia from the Human Rights Council. Azerbaijani authorities avoided direct criticism of the Kremlin, a "strategic silence" calculated not to provoke Moscow, given Russia's capacity to meddle in the Karabakh conflict next door. Yet, despite its silence,

Azerbaijan signaled a mild rebuke through deeds: it sent Ukraine humanitarian aid and over 100 tons of free fuel for emergency vehicles via its state oil company, and it steadfastly refused to recognize the Russian-backed breakaway "republics" in Donetsk and Luhansk (Ali 2022). These subtle actions aligned with the international support for Ukraine's sovereignty, albeit without Baku overtly lambasting the Kremlin.

Many of the states yet within the non-committal group in 2014, such as U.S., U.K., France, Germany etc. as mentioned previously took a cautious step and sought quick end to the conflict in Crimea and re-engaged Russia soon after. However, these states shifted to become Solidarity Hawks in the face of Russian invasion of Ukraine prior and because of the 2022 invasion. On the other hand, some states such as Japan and South Korea, important democratic states outside the region, joined this group of Non-committal Hedgers from their original Peripheral Onlooker group in 2014. Japan and South Korea – U.S. allies in East Asia – strongly condemned Russia's full-scale invasion and aligned themselves with Western sanctions, yet their overall involvement remained more limited, reflecting a high-rhetoric/low-escalation typology. Tokyo's reaction to the 2022 war was far more forceful than its mild 2014 stance: under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Japan imposed unprecedented sanctions in lockstep with the G7 (including freezing Russia's central bank assets and even sanctioning Putin personally), a "stark contrast" to the token measures Japan applied after Crimea's annexation (Michito, 2022). At the same time, Japan's support, while robust economically, did not extend to direct military aid due to its constitutional constraints, indicating a degree of caution despite the tough talk. South Korea likewise shifted from near non-response in 2014 (Seoul criticized Moscow's actions verbally but imposed no sanctions then) to a much more proactive stance in 2022. Seoul joined international financial sanctions, restricted technology exports to Russia, and publicly condemned the invasion

as a violation of the U.N. Charter. It even reportedly found indirect ways to help arm Kyiv (e.g., selling munitions to NATO states resupplying Ukraine) (Hess & Hong, 2023). Still, South Korea carefully calibrated its response – for example, it has stopped short of sending weapons directly to Ukraine, and its ramp-up of sanctions was gradual and sometimes hesitant, revealing an underlying caution in view of its own security calculus (such as managing Russia's influence with North Korea) (Hess & Hong, 2023).

Aside from solid rhetorics and policies regarding Ukraine and Russia. Many of these states including Japan and South Korea also saw large drops in favorability view of Russia due to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, a great reminder that violence spill over can drastically shift people's view, capable of shifting nations on the fence to shift its typology, and consequently adopt more drastic changes.

In sum, the mixed typology states did register negative reactions to Russia's aggression – upholding principles of territorial integrity, participating in selective sanctions or assistance, and voicing disapproval to varying degrees – but their responses were measured and often constrained by political or economic considerations. This cautious rebuke meant that while they were not supportive of Moscow's moves, neither were they as front-forward in denouncing and punishing Russia as the High/High group. Their calibrated approach resulted in criticisms of Russia that were real yet considerably less intense than those of the most outspoken Western powers, reflecting an intermediate stance in the international spectrum of reactions to Russia's actions.

4.3.4.3. Peripheral Onlooker: Neutral or Minimal Responses

States that neither strongly empathize with Ukraine nor feel threatened by Russia have generally responded to Russian aggression with minimal or neutral reactions. This category

largely encompasses major Global South countries – notably China, India, Brazil, South Africa – and many others in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In both the 2014 Crimea annexation and the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, these states avoided direct confrontation with Moscow. They often abstained or remained on the sidelines during United Nations votes addressing Russia's actions, and they refrained from any robust punitive measures. Their official rhetoric has been ambivalent: instead of condemning Russia outright, they issue calls for restraint and dialogue by "all parties," avoid naming Russia as an aggressor, and urge diplomatic solutions. Correspondingly, they have imposed little to no sanctions on Russia – continuing, or even deepening, economic and strategic ties – in stark contrast to the sweeping sanctions and military aid mobilized by high-empathy or high-threat nations.

China typifies the low-empathy/low-threat response. It abstained on UN resolutions concerning both Crimea in 2014 and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine (Voice of America, 3/16/2014; U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission, 8/6/2025). Chinese representatives argued that pressing the issue at the UN would only "complicate the situation," and the Chinese delegate in 2014 said China had "no choice" but to abstain rather than condemn Russia (Voice of America, 3/16/2014). Throughout the crisis, China's statements have emphasized political negotiation and restraint instead of blame. Notably, Beijing has rejected Western sanctions on Russia; it continues high-level cooperation and trade with Moscow. In fact, China–Russia commerce expanded after the invasion – bilateral trade hit a record $190 billion in 2022 as China increased purchases of Russian energy (Reuters, 1/12,2023). This enduring partnership underscores China's reluctance to isolate Russia despite the war.

India has likewise maintained a formally neutral stance. It abstained from successive votes in the UN Security Council, General Assembly and Human Rights Council that sought to

condemn Russia's aggression. Indian officials voiced "deep concern" about the conflict and urged respect for sovereignty and an immediate end to hostilities, but never singled out Russia by name (Tellis, 2022). New Delhi's refrain has been that dialogue and diplomacy are the only way forward, avoiding any direct censure of Moscow. Consistent with this posture, India imposed no bilateral sanctions on Russia. Instead, it has pursued its own economic interests – for example, ramping up imports of discounted Russian oil to meet its energy needs. By 2023 Russia had become India's top oil supplier (accounting for about 35% of India's crude supply) as Indian purchases of Russian oil surged in the wake of Western sanctions (Patel & Shah, 2025). India's continued strategic and trade engagement with Moscow, despite the war, reflects its calculation that alienating Russia would bring no benefit and could harm India's access to crucial resources (Seshadri, 2023).

Similar inaction or neutrality was taken up by other BRICS members, both Brazil and South Africa remained on the sidelines urging peaceful solution and dialogues without joining the sanction regime or criticize Russia. Their cautious approach reflects their overall ambivalence and lack of stake in protecting Ukraine, a state they felt no particular affinity towards, nor wanting to hurt their ties with Moscow.

Each of these Low Empathy × Low Threat states have thus responded to Russia's aggression with restrained criticism and limited action. Their reactions stand in clear contrast to those of high-empathy and high-threat perception countries (such as Eastern European states or Western allies of Ukraine), which have vocally condemned Moscow, enacted tough sanctions, and provided direct aid to Ukraine. Although, Russia's image did take a dip in public opinion polls even in some of these nations, unlike more affected states, the low/low group sees little incentive to risk its relations with Russia. The lack of both emotional stake in Ukraine's plight

and of perceived danger from Russia correlates with a strong reluctance to adopt hostile policies toward Moscow. In essence, without a sense of solidarity with Ukraine or a fear of Russian aggression, these countries prefer to remain neutral and preserve their own interests – rather than join in confrontational efforts against Russia. This pragmatic neutrality has defined the Global South's muted response to the Ukraine war, underlining how low empathy and low threat perception translate into minimal pushback against Moscow's actions.

4.3.4.4 Summary Table for Escalating Hostility toward Russia in 2014 and 2022

In summary, the joint presence of high threat perception and strong empathetic identification emerges as the key driver of escalating hostility toward Russia. Between 2014 to 2022, not only did Solidarity Hawk states expands to include more prominent powers such as U.S., U.K., France, and Germany in addition to the frontline states, they also adopted much stronger hostility towards the perpetrator, a trajectory fueled by broad-based domestic mandates to counter Russia's challenge. Non-committal Hedger states, missing either the galvanizing fear or the deep sense of solidarity, registered qualified increases in hostility but continued to straddle caution and confrontation. Peripheral Onlooker states, feeling neither the victim's pain nor the predator's shadow, stayed largely disengaged, showing only minimal adjustment in face of even unprecedented Russian aggression. These divergent pathways vividly demonstrate how empathy and threat together shape the magnitude of third-party hostility: where both forces align, international backlash will escalate sharply, and where one or both are absent, responses remain muted or strictly pragmatic. This typological pattern held consistent across 2014 and 2022, even as the overall severity of Russia's actions.

Table 15 Reactions to Russia in 2014 and 2022

Typology group	Illustrative members	Expected support profile (H2)	Observed Reaction, 2014	Observed Reaction, 2022
Solidarity Hawk	2014: Poland, Baltic states, Georgia 2022: Poland, Baltics, Romania, UK, U.S., Canada, Nordics, etc.	Timely, substantive hostility towards Russia	**Policy:** Immediate punitive measures (led sanctions; harsh official condemnation; some military aid to Ukraine) **Electoral Shift:** No major realignment **Public Opinion Trend:** Heightened wariness of Russia and moderate outrage	**Policy:** spearheaded sweeping sanctions, extensive arms deliveries, and full diplomatic isolation of Russia **Electoral Shift:** voters decisively rejected Russia-friendly factions and empowered hawkish, pro-Ukraine leaders **Public Opinion Trend:** near-unanimous negative views of Russia and support for confronting Moscow
Non-committal Hedger	2014: Western Europe, N. America, the Nordics 2022: e.g., Spain, Ireland, Japan, S. Korea)	Limited, nuanced, and cautious rebuke	Cautious measures No discernible impact on elections Lukewarm and divided public response	Expanded countermeasures but still cautious. Some mainstream parties toughened their Russia stance (to preempt challengers) Stronger public condemnation of Russia, yet with some caution.
Peripheral Hedger	China, India, Belarus, Armenia, Africa, Middle East, Latin America	Little to no antagonism towards Russia	Generic calls for peaceful solution, abstaining from UN votes.	Generic calls for peaceful solution, abstaining from UN votes. Slightly more negative public opinion regarding Russia

4.4 Summary: Cross-Case Reflections

Across the three episodes examined in this chapter—the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, the 2014 annexation of Crimea (and war in the Donbas), and the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine—third-party democratic responses moved from hesitation and limited censure to

unprecedented unity, material support, and institutional realignment. Read through the dissertation's empathy–threat lens, this temporal arc is not accidental: it reflects systematic variation in observers' empathetic identification with victims and their perceived threat from the perpetrator, jointly conditioning attention, support towards the victim, and hostility toward the perpetrator.

First, the cases validate Hypothesis 1 (heightened attention) in a graded fashion. In 2008, ambiguity over victimhood, compressed timelines, and weak identification with Georgia limited sustained public and elite attention. By 2014, Russia's forcible annexation of sovereign territory clarified the violation and increased salience—especially among Central-Eastern European democracies for whom the episode resonated historically—but attention remained compartmentalized and partially offset by economic interdependence with Russia. In 2022, by contrast, empathetic resonance surged well beyond the region as graphic documentation of civilian harm, President Zelenskyy's direct appeals, and the war's systemic stakes recast the conflict as a moral and security crisis for the Euro-Atlantic community. The steep, durable rise in public and media focus helped lower the political costs for leaders to move from rhetoric to costly action.

Second, the comparative record supports Hypothesis 2 (support for the victim). In 2014, assistance to Ukraine was real but bounded—largely financial sanctions, limited lethal aid, and diplomatic isolation of Russia as many states except Poland and the Baltics fall into the High x Low category. In 2022, many of the states shifted to the High x High typology - recognizing the systemic threat Russia imposes - sustained military assistance, intelligence sharing, refugee reception, macro-financial packages, and rapid innovations in collective defense (e.g., NATO force posture changes; EU defense financing). These policy escalations track precisely the shift

from mixed empathy/mid-level threat (2014) to High-Empathy × High-Threat (2022). As Chapter 3 showed in the Hong Kong–Taiwan domain, support is also electorally mediated: where publics strongly empathize with victims and feel directly endangered, parties offering credible deterrence and alliance-deepening are rewarded, which in turn extends and locks-in support policies. The post-2022 reinforcement of hard-liner platforms in the Baltics and parts of Central Europe exemplifies this electoral mechanism within the Russia–Ukraine context as well.

Third, the evidence strongly corroborates Hypothesis 3 (hostility toward the perpetrator), but with scope conditions. In 2008, the West's "reset" logic coexisted with rhetorical condemnation; sanctions were absent, and Russia paid few enduring costs. In 2014, coordinated—but still selective—sanctions and Russia's ejection from the G8 marked a step-change in hostility, yet left large domains of energy and finance partly insulated. Only in 2022—when empathy and threat jointly peaked—did hostility become comprehensive: central-bank–level sanctions, export controls on dual-use technology, seizures of elite assets, legal and investigative pathways for atrocity accountability, and the political marginalization of Russia across international fora. Even then, the chapter's comparative material also flags boundary conditions: distributive costs (energy prices, inflation), party polarization in some polities, and hedging strategies outside the Euro-Atlantic space can dampen or delay the translation of hostility into action.

Finally, the chapter's cross-case comparison strengthens the dissertation's external validity. The same psychological and political micro-foundations traced in Chapter 3 (Hong Kong → Taiwan) travel to interstate war in Europe: when observers both identify with victims and fear becoming victims themselves, the spillover of violence reliably reorders preferences, coalitions, and institutions. Where either ingredient is missing, responses are more symbolic,

slower, or fragmented. Anticipating future crises, the framework therefore yields a clear forecast: Solidarity Hawks will continue to produce rapid attention spikes, robust victim support, and durable anti-perpetrator coalitions—especially when attribution is clear and domestic costs are cushioned—whereas Peripheral Onlookers will not. This contingent but powerful logic links public psychology to foreign policy in a way that both explains the past fifteen years of responses to Russian aggression and offers tractable guidance for scholars and practitioners confronting the next shock.

5. Conclusion

This dissertation has examined how democratic publics and governments respond to foreign violence, developing a framework that foregrounds the joint role of empathy and threat perception. Through cross-case comparisons and multimethod analysis, I demonstrated that these factors—though analytically distinct—interact to shape when and how democracies engage with distant crises. The central finding is that the most forceful and durable responses arise not from material interest alone, nor from moral outrage alone, but from the convergence of both: when citizens and leaders see themselves in the victims and also fear the repercussions of aggression.

The implications reach beyond the specific cases of Russian aggression in Georgia, Crimea, and Ukraine, and Chinese repression in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. They compel us to view democratic foreign policy not simply as the product of rational security calculation, nor as a transient surge of humanitarian sentiment, but as an evolving process of narrative construction in which empathy and threat fuse. Modern communication technologies—Twitter networks, Google searches, viral images—have made the reverberations of violence more immediate, vivid, and difficult for leaders to ignore. The global circulation of narratives such as "Ukraine is part of the European family" or "Today Hong Kong, Tomorrow Taiwan" illustrates how frames can quickly shift distant violence into proximate danger, broadening coalitions and sustaining commitments.

For international relations scholarship, this argument reframes how we think about the drivers of democratic response to external crises. It bridges literature on moral solidarity, threat perception, and public opinion by showing that none is sufficient on their own. The empathy–threat nexus provides a generalizable mechanism that explains variation across cases and over time. It suggests that in a world of increasingly networked publics, the boundaries between

interest and identity, calculation and emotion, are more porous than traditional theories acknowledge.

For empirical conflict studies, the findings highlight the need to incorporate citizen-level perceptions into explanations of state behavior. The evidence shows that elite policy is both constrained and enabled by mass sentiment—sentiment shaped not only by material vulnerability but by shared values and emotional identification. This helps explain why small Eastern European states with limited material capacity often led the way in sanctioning and arming Ukraine, while larger states without the same empathy–threat fusion hesitated.

For policymakers, the analysis underscores that narratives matter. Strategic framing can widen the scope of solidarity, but sustaining support requires linking moral appeals to tangible security stakes. Violence abroad reverberates through digital pathways that can mobilize publics, constrain governments, and ultimately alter the balance of international alignments. Potential perpetrators should heed that their actions are unlikely to remain localized: in an age of global visibility, repression and aggression generate consequences far beyond their immediate theaters.

The broader lesson is that international relations in the twenty-first century cannot be fully understood through the lens of material power or institutional design alone. We must also account for the ways in which democratic citizens process distant violence—through empathy, through fear, and through narratives that make the foreign familiar. By demonstrating how this dual logic shapes engagement, this dissertation urges scholars and practitioners alike to rethink how democracies will respond to the next crisis in an increasingly contested and interconnected world.

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