

WHO SUPPORTS ARMED UNIFICATION WITH TAIWAN IN URBAN CHINA?

QI Dongtao

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Executive Summary

1. Popular nationalism among the Chinese is a double-edged sword for the Chinese government; while it helps to justify and support foreign policy preferences, the Chinese government has to carefully monitor and manage it to avoid pressures imposed by its radicalisation.
2. Public support for armed unification with Taiwan is a typical case of Chinese popular nationalism, a seemingly rising trend after Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party returned to power in 2016, leading to escalating cross-Strait tensions.
3. A survey in 2019 China shows that the male, better educated, high-incomers, Party members, urban *Hukou* holders, those with privileged occupations and those socially more active are more in favour of armed unification than the female, less educated, middle and low-incomers, non-Party members, rural *Hukou* holders, those with less privileged occupations and those socially less active.
4. Those with stronger national pride, particularly those who believe that China is better than Taiwan in politics and economy, are more pro-armed unification. Apparently, public support for armed unification is rooted in those who are privileged, take pride and have confidence in the country.
5. In contrast to previous findings and popular belief, those who understand Taiwan better are more pro-armed unification. Mainland China media's increasingly negative coverage of Taiwan since 2016, particularly of its President Tsai Ing-wen and her administration, may have contributed to this opinion.
6. Due possibly to geographic, economic and cultural proximity to Taiwan, Xiamen and Guangzhou residents are less supportive of armed unification. This has important implication for the Chinese government.

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Background: Armed Unification in Beijing's Taiwan Policy and Its Popular Support

- 1.1 Shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) tried to unify Taiwan by force. Armed unification was thus the starting point of Beijing's Taiwan policy. After the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Beijing sent troops to support North Korea, while Washington established a common defence system in Asia, sent the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait to prevent Beijing from attacking Taiwan, and signed the "US-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty" with the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or KMT) in 1954, making it impossible for Beijing to unify Taiwan due to its backward military power.
- 1.2 In 1955, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai proposed that "there are two possible ways for the Chinese people to solve the Taiwan issue, namely, war or peace; the Chinese people are willing to strive for a peaceful solution under possible conditions".¹ However, the decade that followed was marked by military conflicts between the two sides. China's shelling of Kinmen continued from 1958 till December 1978 when China and the United States issued a communiqué establishing diplomatic relations.² Therefore, during the three decades before China's reform and opening up, the two sides of the Taiwan Strait were in a military standoff, with no to little communication in the political, economic and social fields, and with the military playing the most important role in cross-strait relations.

* Qi Dongtao is Research Fellow at the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore.

¹ Party History Research Office of the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1980. "Zhonggong Dangshi Cankao Ziliao (8)" (Reference materials on the history of the Chinese Communist Party 8). http://www.gov.cn/test/2005-07/29/content_18285.htm, accessed 7 February 2021.

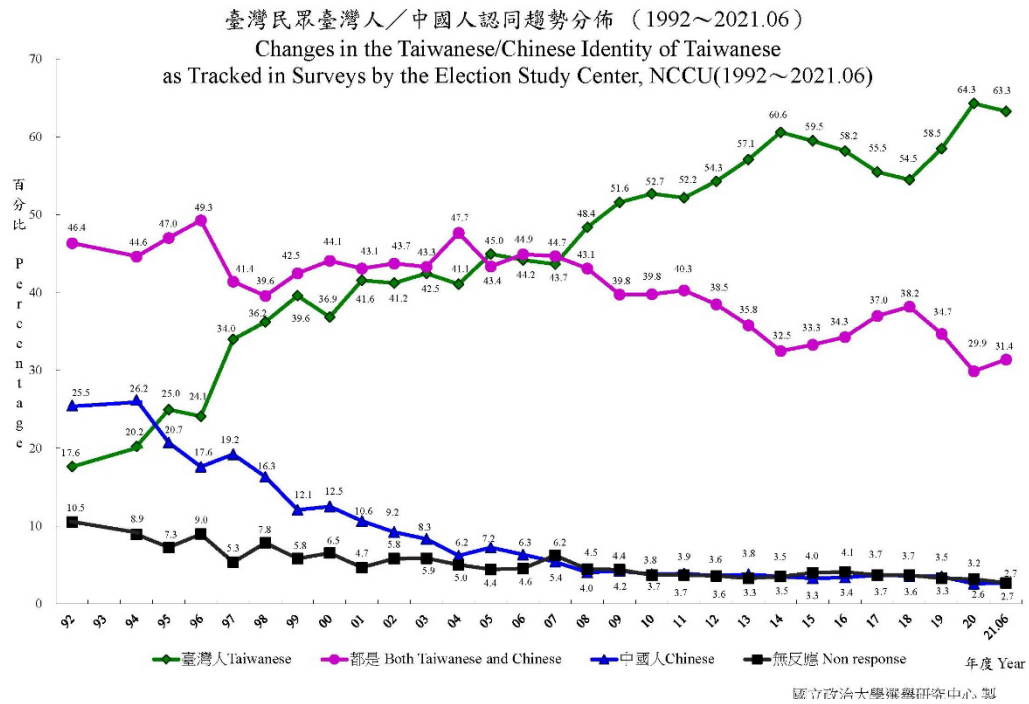
² Gov.cn, 2006. "Guangfangbu Guanyu Tingzhi Dui Dajinmen Deng Daoyu Paoji De Shengming" (Statement of the Ministry of National Defence on the cessation of shelling of Da Jinmen and other islands (January 1979) http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-02/28/content_213299.htm Feb 28, accessed 7 February 2021.

- 1.3 After China kickstarted its reform and open up, Taiwan's capital, talents and technologies have entered China in large numbers, making important contributions to China's economic development. On the other hand, China is working towards locking Taiwan in economic dependence to influence Taiwanese society and politics in the direction that is favourable to unification. Economic factors have thus played the most important role in cross-strait relations since the 1980s, favouring the economic development of China on the one hand and enabling China to achieve certain influence on Taiwanese society and politics on the other.
- 1.4 The more than 40 years of reform have greatly transformed China's economy to become the second largest in the world. In 1979 when China began to promote its peaceful unification policy, China's gross domestic product (GDP) was about five times Taiwan's and about seven per cent of the United States'. In 2018, the figure shot up to about 22 times Taiwan's and about 65% of the United States'.³ In the same year, seven Chinese provinces had each surpassed Taiwan in terms of GDP.⁴ Economic success has greatly enhanced the confidence and pride of mainland Chinese.
- 1.5 However, economic success is not enough to bring Taiwanese closer to the Mainland as increasingly more Taiwanese consider themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese, and are hence more inclined to support Taiwan independence. As Figures 1 and 2 show, both Taiwanese identity and public support for Taiwan independence have further grown since 2018 and reached record highs in 2020. Rising Taiwanese nationalism has undoubtedly stimulated discussions of armed unification among Chinese whose nationalist sentiments have been rising as well.

³ Calculated from <https://countryeconomy.com/gdp?year=1979> & <https://countryeconomy.com/gdp?year=2018>, accessed 31 January 2021.

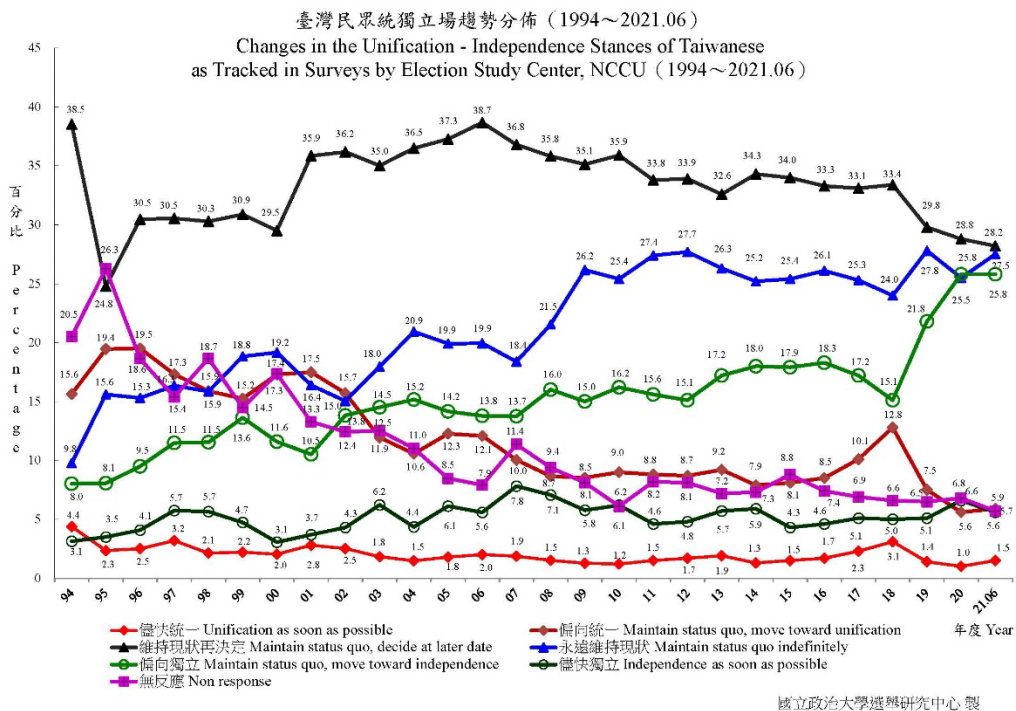
⁴ In 2018, the seven Chinese provinces that surpassed Taiwan in terms of GDP (gross domestic product) were Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shandong, Zhejiang, Henan, Sichuan and Hubei. See <https://data.stats.gov.cn/easyquery.htm?cn=E0103>, accessed 31 January 2021.

FIGURE 1 CHANGES IN THE TAIWANESE/CHINESE IDENTITY OF TAIWANESE



Source: <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/upload/44/doc/6960/People202106.jpg>, accessed 11 August 2021.

FIGURE 2 CHANGES IN THE UNIFICATION-INDEPENDENCE STANCES OF TAIWANESE



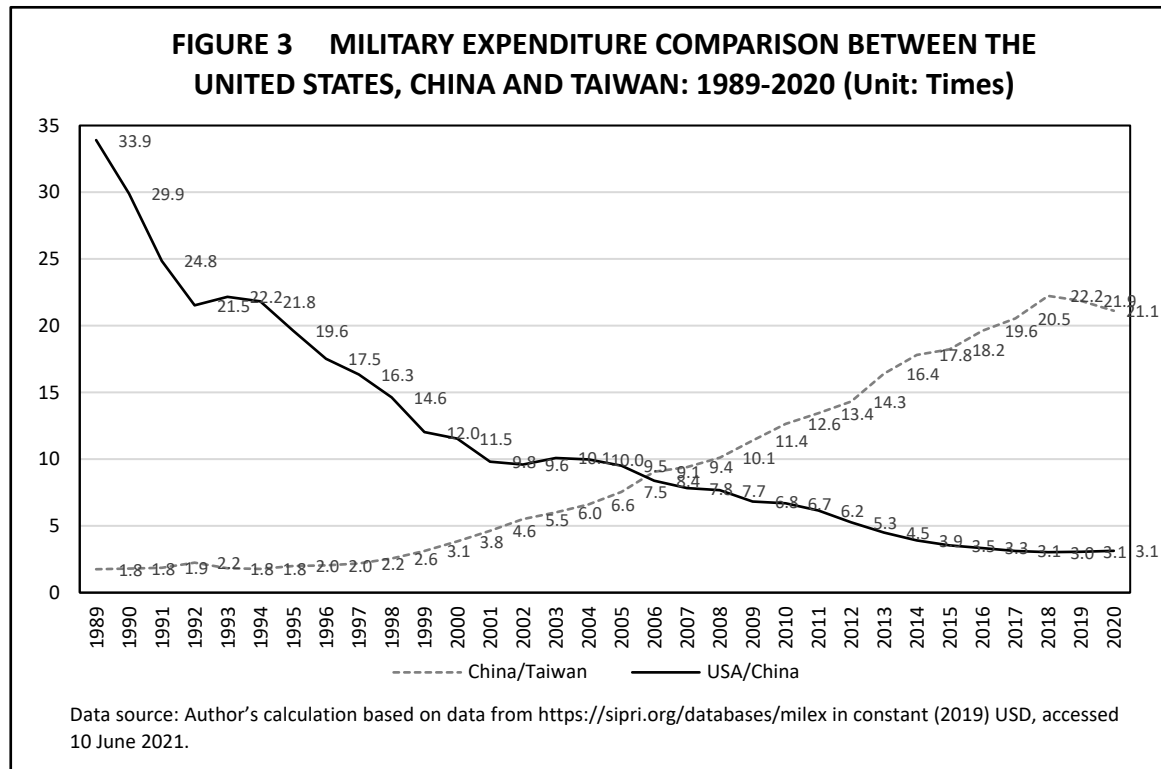
Source: <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/upload/44/doc/6962/Tondu202106.jpg>, accessed 11 August 2021.

- 1.6 Why China has never promised to abandon armed unification is the uncertainty that unification can be achieved through peaceful means. Therefore, armed unification highlights Beijing's determination for unification and is the ultimate guarantee that unification will eventually be achieved. Moreover, Beijing believes that without armed unification as a clear bottom line in its Taiwan policy, peaceful unification is even less likely to happen. Indeed, polls in Taiwan have indicated that support for Taiwan independence would greatly increase if China does not attack Taiwan after it declares independence.⁵
- 1.7 In Beijing's discourse on armed unification, force will be directed against the pro-independence Taiwanese minority and not against Taiwan compatriots who Beijing believes make up the majority. It will be implemented only under certain extreme conditions as specified in the Anti-Secession Law.⁶ The Anti-Secession Law was enacted in 2005 to deter the then Chen Shui-bian administration from promoting de jure independence in his second term. It not only provides the legal basis for Beijing to use non-peaceful means to deal with the Taiwan issue, but also clarifies the circumstances under which Beijing may use force.
- 1.8 Another important factor influencing Beijing's choice of armed unification is China's military power and US policy towards Taiwan. An armed unification that lacks military strength to support it, notably with the possibility of US military intervention, would not only be difficult to succeed, but also extremely costly for China. Therefore, one of the major goals for China's military modernisation is for

⁵ Papers, 2020. "Huibuhui Wutong Taiwan? Guotaiban Yuan Fuzhuren Wang Zaixi: Haiyou Disantiao Daolu Ke Xuan" (Will there be armed unification of Taiwan? Wang Zaixi, former deputy director of the State Council Taiwan Office: there is a third way to choose). https://www.sohu.com/a/430221713_260616. Nov 07, accessed 7 February 2021; Pan, H H, W C Wu and Y T Chang (2017). "How Chinese Citizens Perceive Cross-Strait Relations: Survey Results from Ten Major Cities in China". *The Journal of Contemporary China*. 26(106): 616-631.

⁶ "Article 8 In the event that the 'Taiwan independence' secessionist forces should act under any name or by any means to cause the fact of Taiwan's secession from China, or that major incidents entailing Taiwan's secession from China should occur, or that possibilities for a peaceful reunification should be completely exhausted, the state shall employ non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity". National People's Congress, 14 March 2005. "Anti-Secession Law". <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/999999999/t187406.htm>, accessed 10 August 2020. People's Daily Overseas, 1999. "Women Weishenme Buchengnuo Fangqi Shiyong Wuli" (Why We Don't Commit To Renouncing the Use of Force). Sep 11th; Xi Jinping, 2019. "Xi Jinping Zai Gao Taiwan Tongbao Shu Fabiao 40 Zhounian Jinianhui Shang De Jianghua" (Xi Jinping's speech at the 40th anniversary of the publication of the "Letter to Taiwan Compatriots").

addressing the Taiwan issue.⁷ With the rapid growth of China's economic power, China's military power has also strengthened significantly. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, China's military spending increased from 1.8 to 21.1 times Taiwan's from 1989 to 2020 (Figure 3), while that of the United States decreased from 33.9 to 3.1 times China's during the same period. Taiwan and US governments' reports also confirm that China has achieved great military advantages over Taiwan, imposing tremendous threat to Taiwan's security.⁸



1.9 While the United States has been supporting Taiwan in upgrading its defence capabilities through arms sales, it has not confirmed if it will send troops to assist in Taiwan's defence should China attack Taiwan. While China's military power

⁷ Oriana Skylar Mastro. July/August 2021. "The Taiwan Temptation: Why Beijing Might Resort to Force". *Foreign Affairs*. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-06-03/china-taiwan-war-temptation?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign; *Xinhua*. 24 July 2019. "China's National Defense in the New Era", <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/whitepaperonnationaldefenseinnewera.doc>, all accessed 17 June 2021.

⁸ *China Times*, 2020. "Guofangbu 109 Nian Zhonggong Junli Baogaoshu" (Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020). <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>, <https://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20200831002518-260417?chdtv>. September 1, accessed 7 February 2021; Oriana Skylar Mastro. July/August 2021. "The Taiwan Temptation: Why Beijing Might Resort to Force". *Foreign Affairs*. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-06-03/china-taiwan-war-temptation?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign. accessed 17 June 2021.

continues to grow, Taiwan's defence capabilities have relatively declined and the cost of US military intervention has become much higher, boosting the confidence of the Chinese government and public of possible success of armed unification.⁹

- 1.10 Although armed unification has been an integral part of China's Taiwan policy, there is a lack of systematic research on Chinese public views of armed unification. This could be attributed to the academic belief that armed unification will not happen and public opinions have no bearing on Beijing's policy of armed unification. With the rapidly changing trilateral relationship between China, the United States and Taiwan, and the increasingly important role of military factors in the trilateral game, the possibility of military conflict, be it accidental or otherwise, is on the rise. The Chinese public's attitude towards armed unification, as an important indication of popular nationalism, indirectly reflects society's willingness to support the government's use of military means in cross-strait conflicts.
- 1.11 While some scholars argue that Chinese popular nationalism either has no rising impact on foreign policy due to its insignificance or has been subjected to official nationalism because it is closely monitored and regulated by the government,¹⁰ many others argue that Chinese popular nationalism is a double-edged sword¹¹ that Beijing uses to serve its foreign policy and adjust its policy due to its pressure.¹²

⁹ Papers, 2020. "Huibuhui Wutong Taiwan? Guotaiban Yuan Fuzhuren Wang Zaixi: Haiyou Disantiao Daolu Ke Xuan"; Oriana Skylar Mastro. July/August 2021. "The Taiwan Temptation: Why Beijing Might Resort to Force". *Foreign Affairs*. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-06-03/china-taiwan-war-temptation?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign. accessed 17 June 2021.

¹⁰ Johnston, A I (2017). "Is Chinese Nationalism Rising? Evidence from Beijing". *International Security* 41(3): 7-43.

¹¹ Zhong, Y and W Hwang (2020). "Why Do Chinese Democrats Tend to Be More Nationalistic? Explaining Popular Nationalism in Urban China". *The Journal of Contemporary China*. 29(121): 61-74. p. 73. Zhao, S (2013). "Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: the strident turn". *The Journal of Contemporary China*, 22(82): 535-553.

¹² Ibid. Gries, P H, D Steiger and T Wang (2016). "Popular Nationalism and China's Japan Policy: the Diaoyu Islands protests, 2012-2013." Zheng, Y (1999). *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: modernization, identity, and international relations*. Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, Gries, P H (2004). *China's new nationalism : pride, politics, and diplomacy*. Berkeley, University of California Press, Pan, H H, W C Wu and Y T Chang (2017). "How Chinese Citizens Perceive Cross-Strait Relations: Survey Results from Ten Major Cities in China". Alastair Iain Johnston, "The correlates of Beijing public opinion toward the United States, 1998-2004", in Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross, eds., *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 340-378. Weiss, JC. *Powerful patriots : nationalist protest in China's foreign relations*, Reilly, J (2012). *Strong society, smart state : the rise of public opinion in China's Japan policy*. New York, Columbia University Press.

Therefore, at the policy level, public opinion on armed unification is still an issue that deserves more attention.¹³

- 1.12 There are two types of popular support for armed unification in China. One supports the current peaceful unification policy of the government, including the option of armed unification under certain circumstances, and the decision of the government on the time and form of armed unification. The other is more radical and believes that peaceful unification is hopeless and will only make unification more challenging, while the conditions for armed unification, including China's military strength, are ripe for implementation at the earliest opportunity. This latter group of radical nationalists often criticise the government's current peaceful unification policy as too weak and ineffectual in curbing Taiwan's pro-independence forces, and nicknamed Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office as a "Kneeling Taiwan Office" (*gui taiban*).¹⁴
- 1.13 Existing studies of Chinese public support for armed unification tend to observe the latter category of support. Surveys normally considered armed and peaceful unification as two completely opposing options and respondents had only the two choices in the same survey question. For example, a study found that only six per cent of residents in 10 Chinese major cities supported armed unification in 2013.¹⁵ The questioning method of pitting armed unification against peaceful unification may be able to identify those most radical nationalists, the second category described earlier, but not those who support Beijing's conditional armed unification policy, the first category.

¹³ Gries, P H, Q Zhang, H M Crowson and H Cai (2011). "Patriotism, Nationalism and China's US Policy: Structures and Consequences of Chinese National Identity". *The China Quarterly* (London) 205(205): 1-17, Pan, H H, W C Wu and Y T Chang (2017). "How Chinese Citizens Perceive Cross-Strait Relations: Survey Results from Ten Major Cities in China".

¹⁴ Hong Kong 01, 2020. "Sun Lan, 'Zhanlang' Yu 'Gui Tai' Chujing Ganga De Guotaiban" (Sun Lan, "War Wolf" and "Kneeling to Taiwan" The Taiwan Affairs Office in an Awkward Situation) <https://cutt.ly/vkttncD>, https://weibo.com/p/10080891628b413e4badc2b60013310fc14c66/super_index Dec 20, accessed 7 February 2021.

¹⁵ Pan, H H, W C Wu and Y T Chang (2017). "How Chinese Citizens Perceive Cross-Strait Relations: Survey Results from Ten Major Cities in China".

- 1.14 What was ignored was the conditional nature of armed unification in Beijing's Taiwan policy: Beijing's policy is peaceful unification but will enact armed unification under certain conditions, making armed and peaceful unification not completely opposed and mutually exclusive. This means that choosing only peaceful unification or only armed unification is not consistent with Beijing's Taiwan policy.
- 1.15 To find these two types of nationalists, respondents in a nine-city mobile phone survey conducted in China in 2019 were asked: Do you agree that Taiwan should not be unified by force under any circumstances?¹⁶ If the respondent answers yes, it means she or he does not support armed unification at all and could even be opposing the government's conditional armed unification; if the answer is no, it means she or he supports either the government's armed unification as the last resort (i.e. the first type of support) or armed unification at the earliest opportunity (i.e. the second type of support). The survey in 2019 shows that 53.1% of the respondents support armed unification, 39.1% oppose it and 7.8% was an indecisive "don't know".

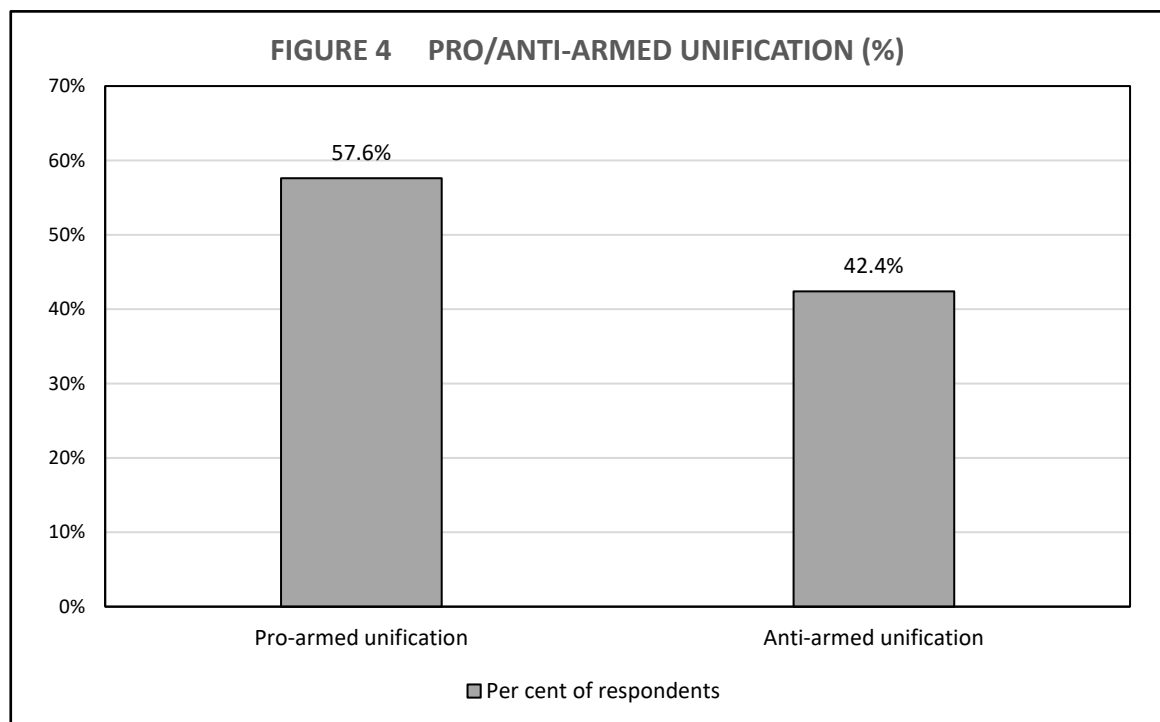
Support for Armed Unification: Social Demographic and National Pride Factors

- 2.1 Existing studies of Chinese nationalism and cross-Strait relations have identified four types of factors which might affect individual Chinese's nationalistic sentiment: social demographic factors, national pride, understanding of Taiwan and Taiwanese, and residence city. More specifically, the studies find that in terms of social demographic factors generally Chinese elites, such as the better educated, high-incomers and CCP members, are more liberal and less nationalistic; national pride contributes to people's nationalistic sentiment; those who have travelled to Taiwan

¹⁶ The original Chinese version of the question is “请问您同意“任何情况下都不应该使用武力来统一台湾”这个说法吗?” The survey was conducted by the Institute of Public Policy at South China University of Technology with the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system which has been adopted by several studies of nationalism in China's major cities. The survey was done between March and September 2019, covering nine major cities, Beijing, Shijiazhuang, Xi'an, Wuhan, Chengdu, Nanning, Kunming, Guangzhou and Xiamen, on about 200 respondents in each city and 1,729 in the total sample. Respondents were randomly picked using cellphone numbers in each city; the survey was designed to make each city's sample representative of that city population's age and gender distributions.

are less likely to support armed unification and when the city's economy is more dependent on foreign market, its residents are less nationalistic.¹⁷

2.2 Supporting armed unification indicates strong nationalistic sentiment, so information of these four types of factors through the 2019 survey to single out those who are more likely to support armed unification was collected. Some findings from the survey do not support existing findings, and therefore, deserve more attention and further research.



¹⁷ Jackson S Woods and Bruce J Dickson (2017) Victims and Patriots: Disaggregating Nationalism in Urban China, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 26:104, 167-182, DOI: 10.1080/10670564.2016.1223100; Zhong, Y and W Hwang (2020). "Why Do Chinese Democrats Tend to Be More Nationalistic? Explaining Popular Nationalism in Urban China".

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Zhao, S (2013). "Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: the strident turn". Chubb, A (2014). *Exploring China's "Maritime Consciousness": Public opinion on the South and East China Sea disputes*. Perth USAsia Centre. <http://perthusasia.edu.au/maritime-consciousness>. accessed 11 August 2021.

Pan, J and Y Xu (2018). "China's Ideological Spectrum". *The Journal of Politics*, 80(1): 254-273.

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Pan, J and Y Xu (2018). "China's Ideological Spectrum". Lan, X and B G Li (2015). "The Economics of Nationalism". *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 7(2): 294-325.

Pan, H H, W C Wu and Y T Chang (2020). "Does cross-Strait tourism induce peace? Evidence from survey data on Chinese tourists and non-tourists". *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 20(1): 149-181.

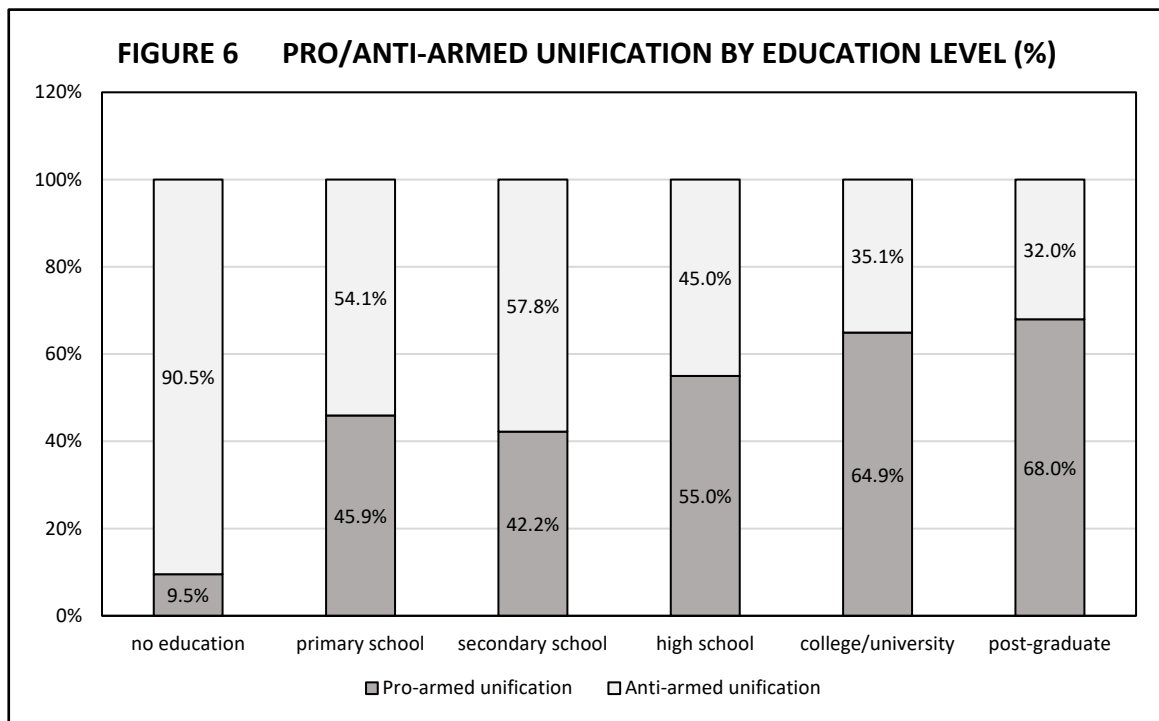
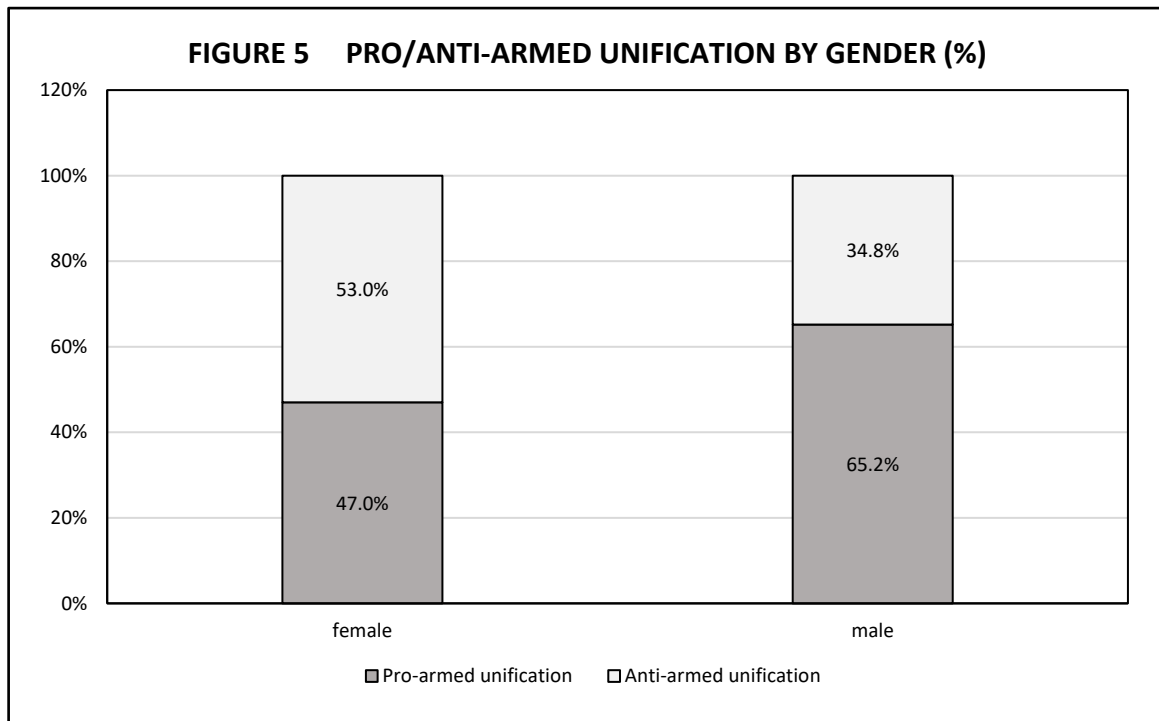
- 2.3 To simplify the analysis, respondents (7.8%) who answered “don’t know” to the armed unification question from the sample were dropped. As Figure 4 shows, in the remaining sample 57.6% of the respondents are pro-armed unification and 42.4% anti-armed unification. These two figures may be seen as the average/overall levels of pro-nationalism and anti-nationalism in the nine cities on the issue of armed unification. If the percentage of pro-armed unification respondents in an examined group is higher than 57.6%, this group may be seen as more nationalistic than the nine-city average.

Social demographic factors

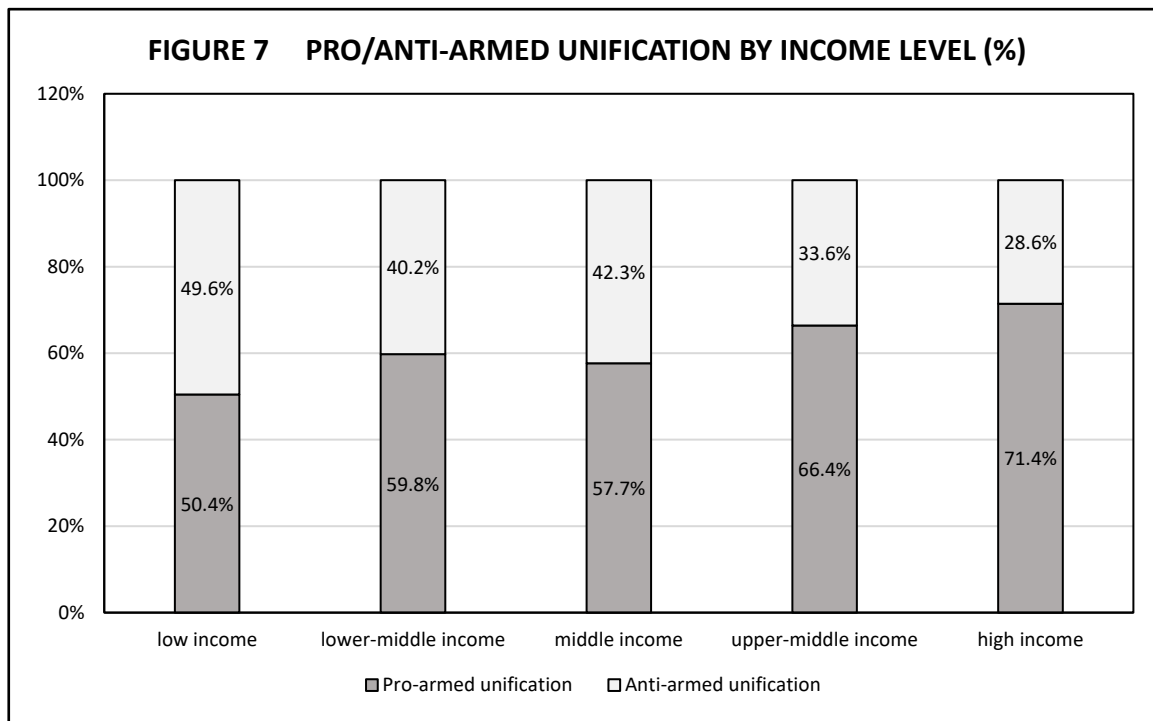
- 2.4 Figures 5-11 show the percentages of pro-armed unification respondents in the groups defined by seven social demographic factors: gender, education, income, occupation, Party membership, *Hukou* (household registration) and social activeness. By comparing these percentages against the nine-city average level of 57.6% and against their respective reference groups, social groups that are more pro-armed unification could be singled out.¹⁸
- 2.5 Figure 5 indicates that 65.2% of the male respondents are pro-armed unification, which is much higher than the 47% of the female respondents and the 57.6% of the nine-city average. This is consistent with existing findings.¹⁹
- 2.6 Figure 6 indicates a positive correlation between education level and pro-armed unification. Pro-armed unification increases as the group’s education level increases, particularly for secondary schools up to post-graduate levels. Sixty-eight per cent of the respondents with post-graduate education are pro-armed unification, much higher than the nine-city average and the 42.2% of those with secondary school education. The figure also shows that respondents with secondary school education or below are more likely to oppose armed unification, as more than half of them are anti-armed unification.

¹⁸ The Chi-squared tests show that the percentage differences between the examined groups defined by the four types of factors respectively are statistically significant.

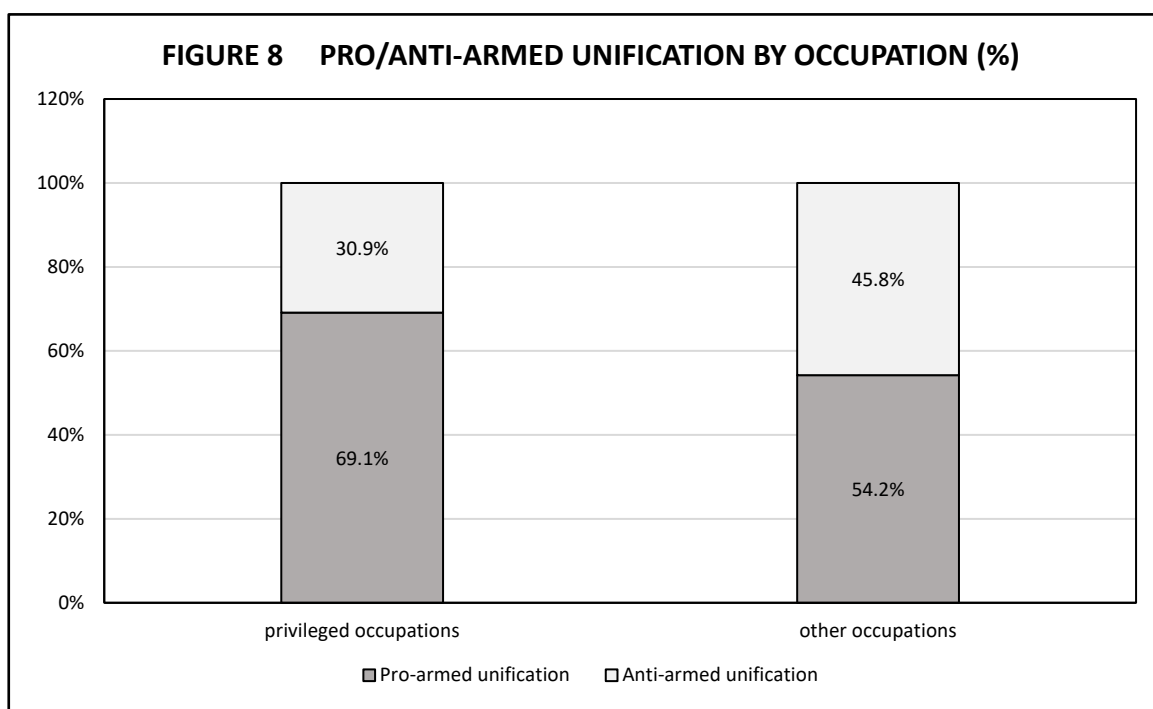
¹⁹ Pan, H H, W C Wu and Y T Chang (2017). “How Chinese Citizens Perceive Cross-Strait Relations: Survey Results from Ten Major Cities in China”.



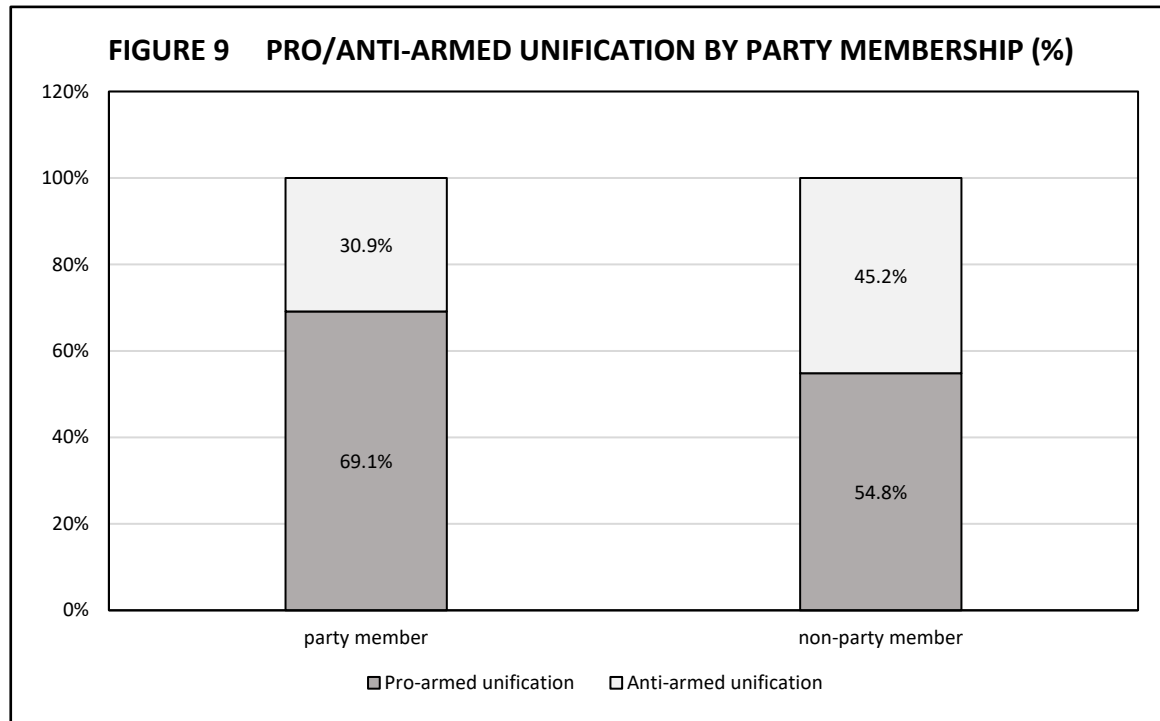
2.7 Like Figure 6, Figure 7 shows that as the respondents' income level increases, their level of pro-armed unification inclination increases concomitantly. A good 71.4% of high-income respondents are pro-armed unification, much higher than the 50.4% of the low-income ones. The level of nationalism of the high-incomers is significantly higher than the nine-city average of 57.6% and especially higher than that of the low-incomers (50.4%).



2.8 Respondents who have professional, governmental, or government-affiliated jobs, such as teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, civil servants and employees in government-affiliated institutes, are the privileged occupation respondents; their level of pro-armed unification is compared to that of other occupations. As shown in Figure 8, respondents with privileged occupations are more pro-armed unification than those with other occupations (69.1% vs 54.2%).

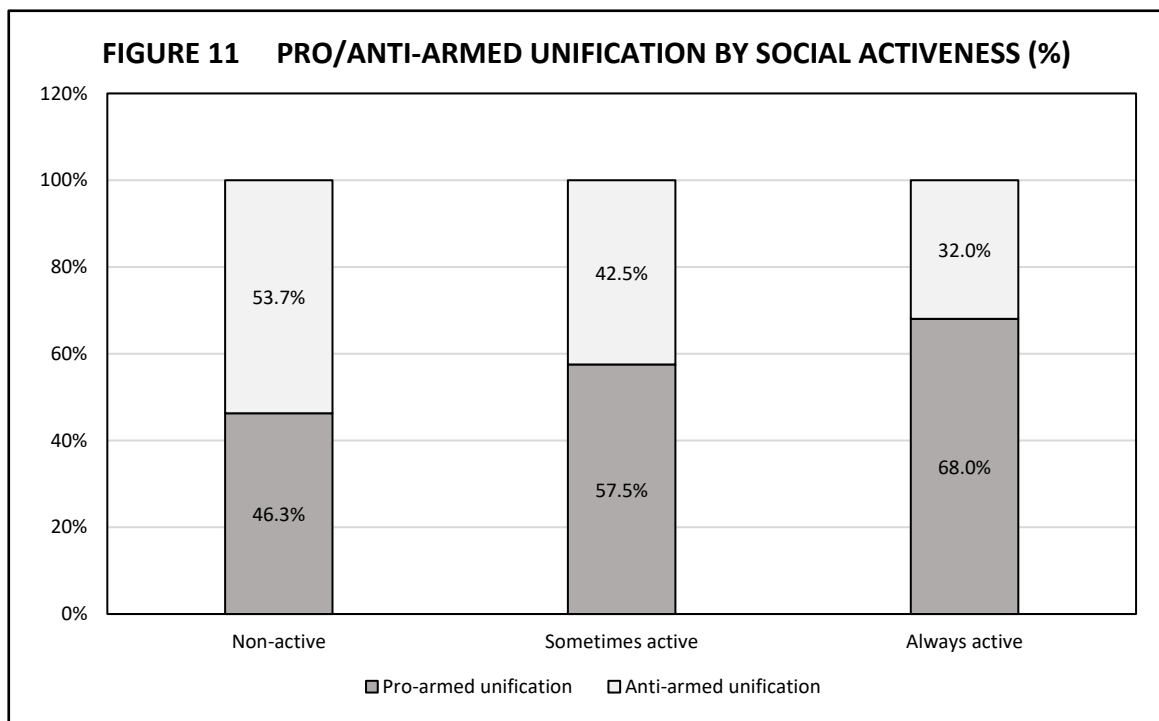
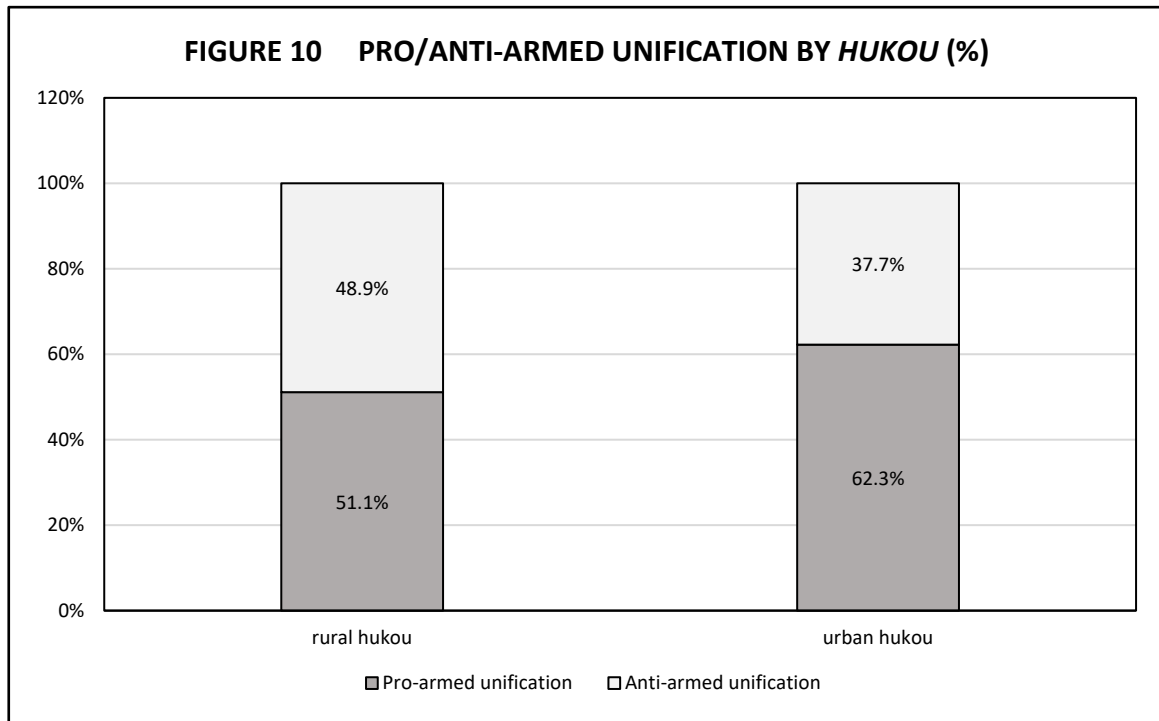


2.9 Figure 9 shows that Party members are more pro-armed unification than non-Party members (69.1% vs 54.8%). CCP members may be seen as the politically privileged in China. The finding also indicates that they have the same level of nationalism on the issue of armed unification as the occupationally privileged as shown in Figure 8 (69.1%).



2.10 Figure 10 indicates that the respondents with urban *Hukou* are more pro-armed unification than those with rural *Hukou* (62.3% vs 51.1%). The latter's level of nationalism is moderately lower than that of the nine-city average. It seems that privileges in occupation, political status and *Hukou* contribute to the respondent's support for armed unification.

2.11 On social activeness, respondents were asked: How often do you participate in social activities, such as classmates or colleagues' gatherings, or social activities organised by the neighborhood community or your work unit? Figure 11 shows that as the respondents are more active socially, their level of pro-armed unification increases concomitantly. The socially most active respondents are much more pro-armed unification than the inactive ones (68% vs 46.3%). The nationalism level of socially inactive respondents is much lower than the sample's overall level, which makes them the anti-armed unification group at 53.7%.



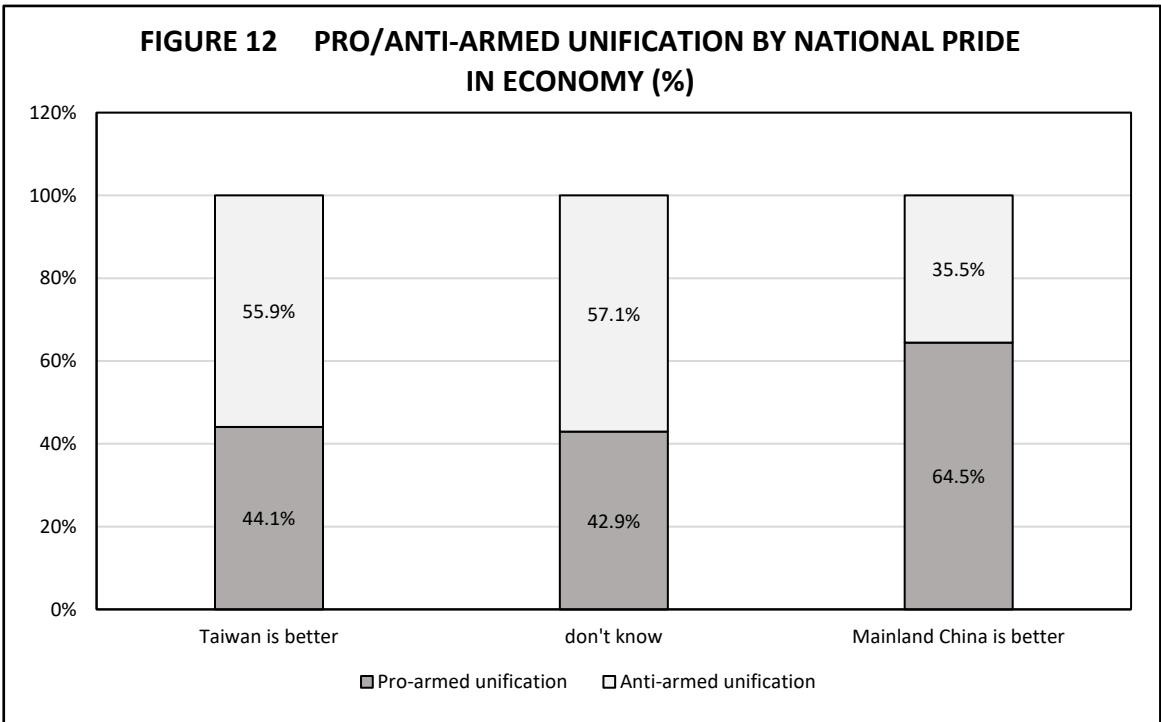
2.12 Based on these findings, the male, better educated, high incomers, Party members, those with privileged occupations or urban *Hukou*, and the socially most active are more pro-armed unification. The common trait of these people is their generally privileged status, compared to the reference groups in their respective socially, economically, or politically defined categories. If they are considered as elites, the findings here challenge existing findings that Chinese elites are usually less

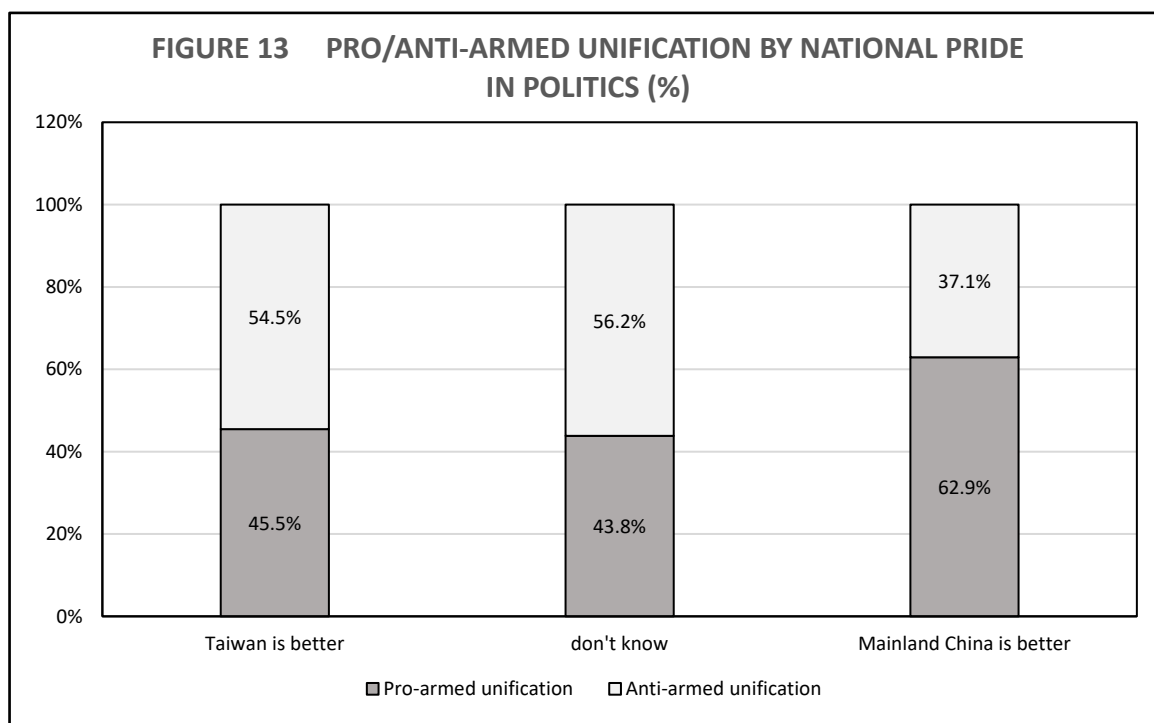
nationalistic. It is likely that they are less nationalistic on other issues, but on the issue of armed unification, they are more nationalistic.

National pride

2.13 If cross-country comparison based national pride is taken as a sense of privilege too, the aforementioned findings may suggest that people with greater national pride are more likely to support armed unification too. Figures 12 and 13 confirm this hypothesis. Respondents were asked to compare China with Taiwan in economy and politics and to indicate the better performer. A respective 64% and 62% of respondents believe China is better than Taiwan in economy and politics, while 10% and 6% of them believe Taiwan is better than China in these two areas, respectively. Figures 12 and 13 show that those having greater national pride (i.e. believing China is better than Taiwan) are more likely to support armed unification.

2.14 More specifically, 64.5% and 62.9% of the respondents who believe China is better than Taiwan in economy and politics are pro-armed unification, compared to 44.1% and 45.5% of those who believe Taiwan is better than China. The two figures also indicate that those believing in Taiwan’s superiority are more likely to oppose armed unification, a sizeable 55.9% and 54.5%, respectively.





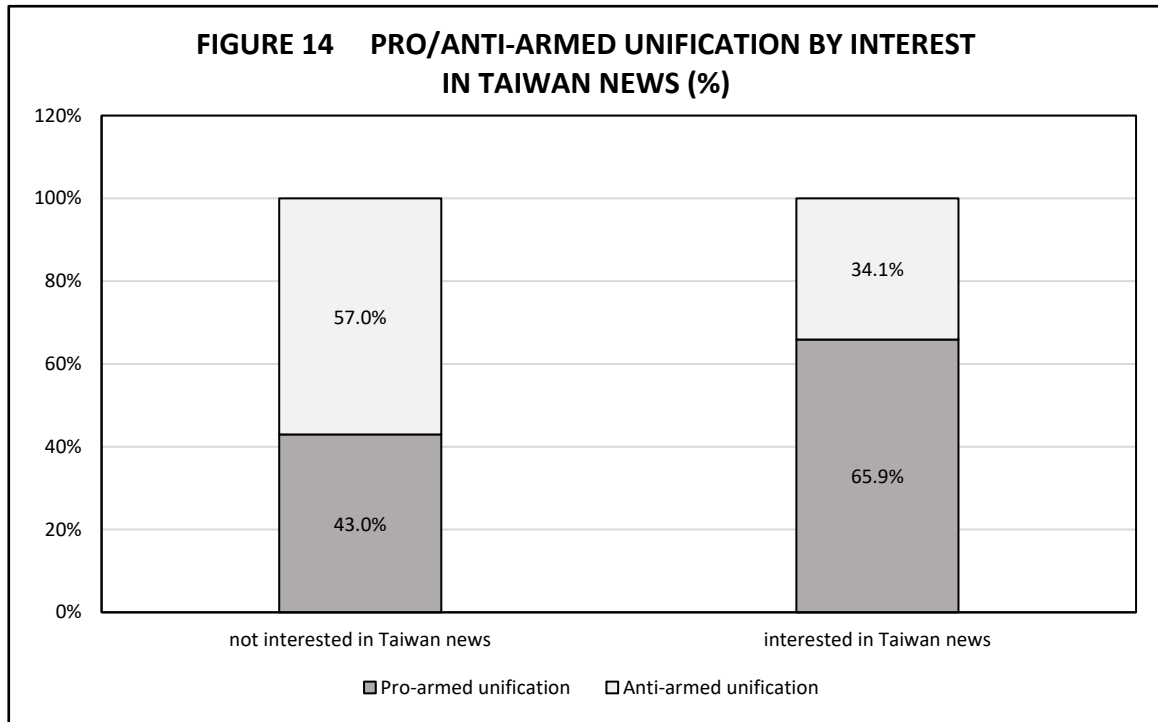
2.15 In general, the examination of social demographic factors and national pride seems to suggest that support for armed unification for the urban Chinese is rooted in a sense of privilege, pride and confidence. It may also suggest that Chinese nationalism may become more militant if this sense of privilege, pride and confidence continues to grow in China.

Support for Armed Unification: Understanding Taiwan

3.1 The third set of factors aim to measure the respondent's understanding of Taiwan and Taiwanese, including the respondent's interest in, knowledge and view of Taiwan, and their in-person contact with Taiwanese. Specifically, respondents are asked if they are interested in Taiwan news, know who the incumbent Taiwan president is, have been to Taiwan, have in-person contact with Taiwanese, and have favourable or unfavourable view of Taiwanese government and society.

3.2 As indicated by Figure 14, 65.9% of those who are interested in Taiwan news are pro-armed unification, while only 43% of those who are not interested are. It is likely that the respondents who are interested in Taiwan news receive more Taiwan news through the mainland Chinese media, which have significantly expanded negative coverage of Taiwan since the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) took power in

2016. As a result, they have become more pro-armed unification than those who are not interested in Taiwan news. In contrast, those who are not interested in Taiwan news might be less influenced by the Chinese media, and therefore, are more anti-armed unification. As shown by Figure 14, 57% of them are anti-armed unification.

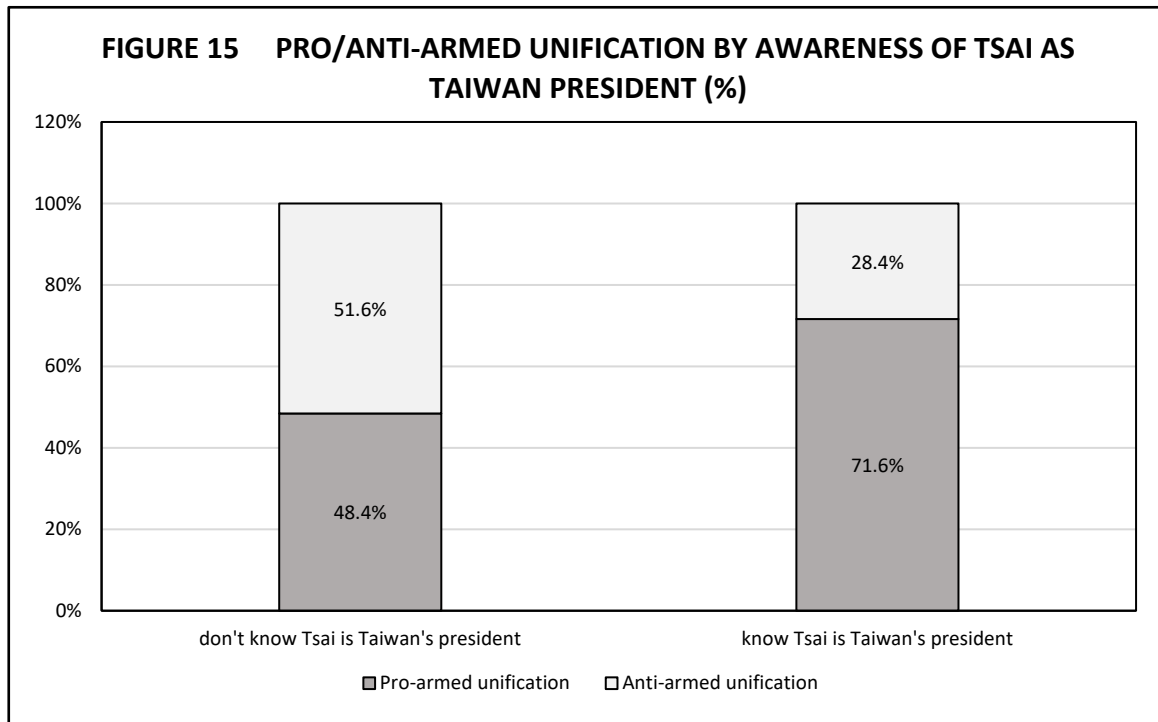


3.3 Figure 15 shows a similar trend to Figure 14. Respondents who are aware of Tsai Ing-wen presidency are much more likely than those who are not to support armed unification (71.6% vs 48.4%). Like those not interested in Taiwan news, those who are unaware of Tsai as Taiwan’s president are more anti-armed unification (51.6%), possibly for the same reason as that for Figure 14, which is mainly due to the mainland Chinese media’s negative reports about Tsai, and vice versa.

3.4 Both the Chinese and Taiwanese governments believe that cross-Strait economic and social interactions may improve mutual understanding, reduce stereotypical perception and prejudice, and eventually, lead to better cross-Strait relations.²⁰ Han et al. found in 2013 surveys that the Chinese who had been to Taiwan or were travelling in Taiwan were less pro-armed unification than those who had not been

²⁰ Wang and Zhang 2018; Xi Jinping, 2019. “Xi Jinping Zai Gao Taiwan Tongbao Shu Fabiao 40 Zhounian Jinianhui Shang De Jianghua” (Xi Jinping’s speech at the 40th anniversary of the publication of the ‘Letter to Taiwan Compatriots’).

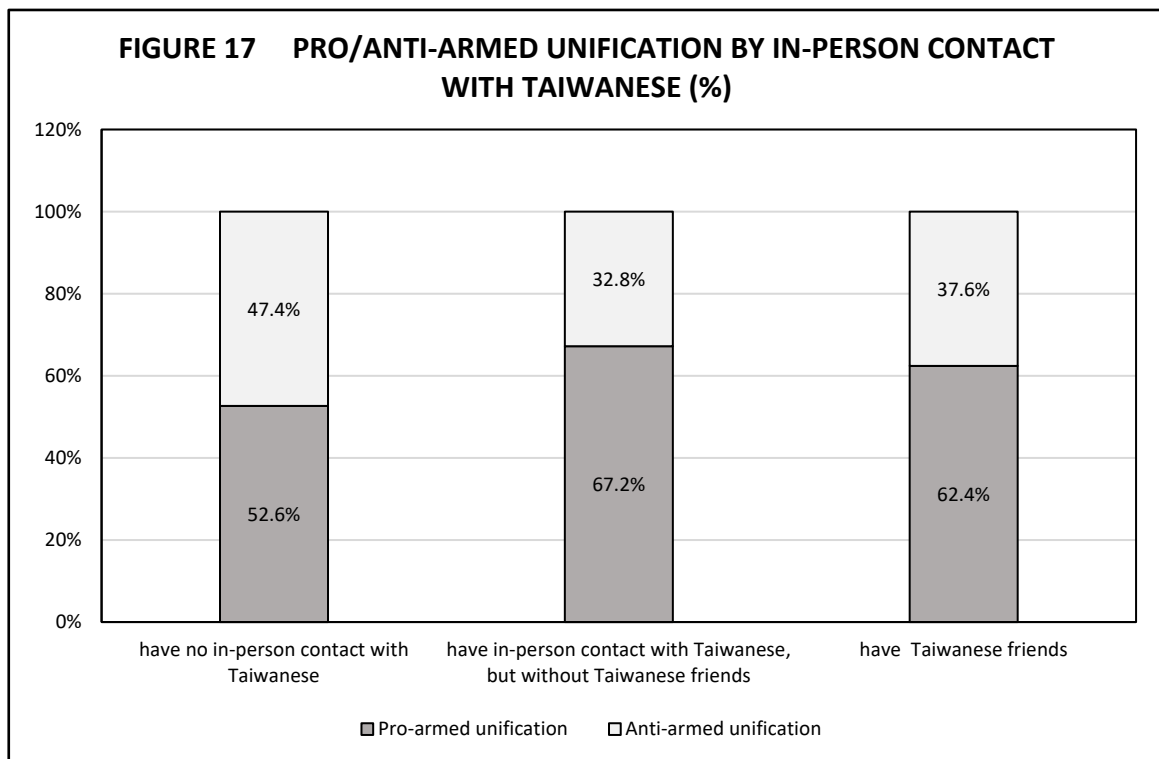
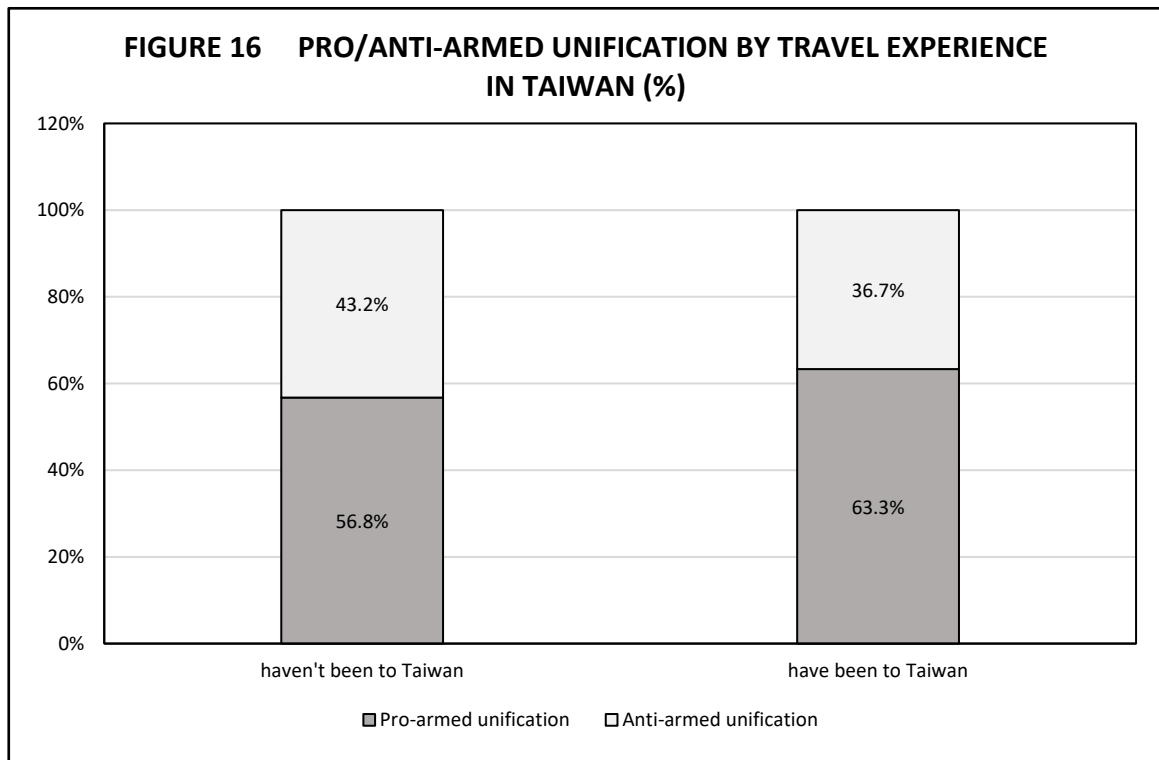
to Taiwan. Nevertheless, they are uncertain if the improved attitude towards Taiwan will remain amid the fluctuating cross-Strait relations, especially after DPP returned to power in 2016.²¹ The survey in this study could throw light on this issue as it was conducted in 2019 when cross-Strait tensions lasted for about three years.



3.5 Unlike the 2013 finding, Figure 16 shows that respondents who have been to Taiwan are more pro-armed unification than those who have not been to Taiwan (63.3% vs 56.8%). There is a similarity between Figure 17 and Figure 16 in that those who have in-person contact with Taiwanese, including those having Taiwanese friends, are more pro-armed unification than those who have no such relationship with Taiwanese.

²¹ Pan, H H, W C Wu and Y T Chang (2017). "How Chinese Citizens Perceive Cross-Strait Relations: Survey Results from Ten Major Cities in China".

Pan, H H., W C Wu and Y T Chang (2020). "Does cross-Strait tourism induce peace? Evidence from survey data on Chinese tourists and non-tourists".



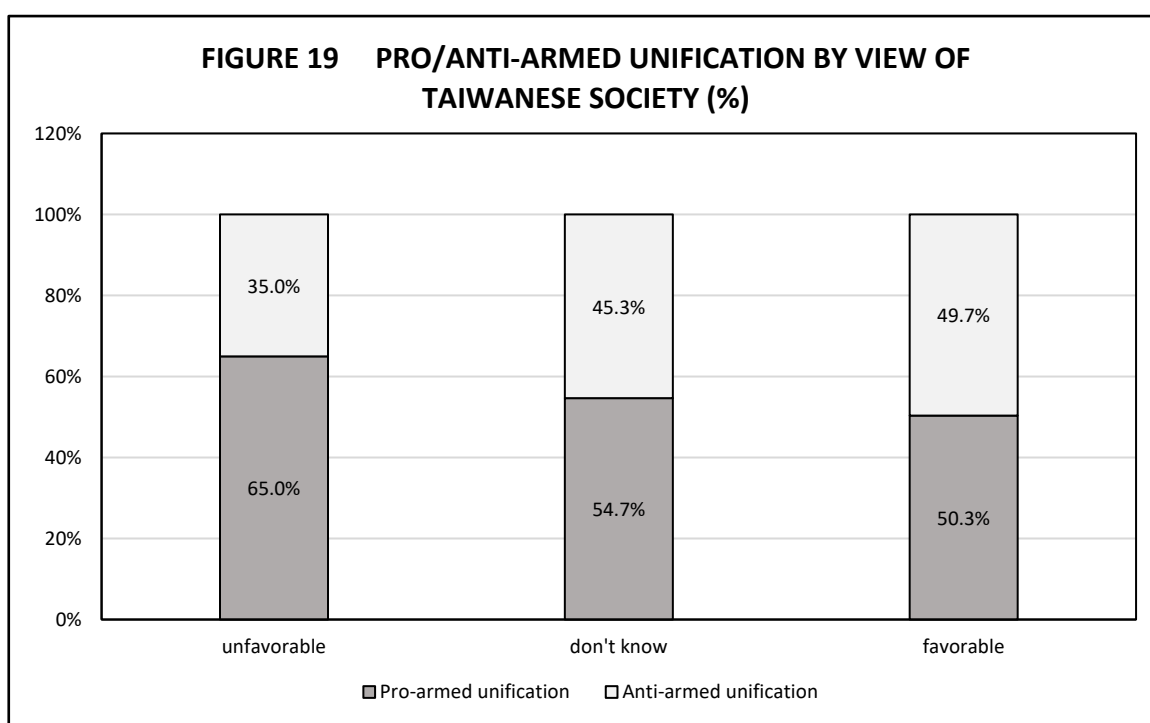
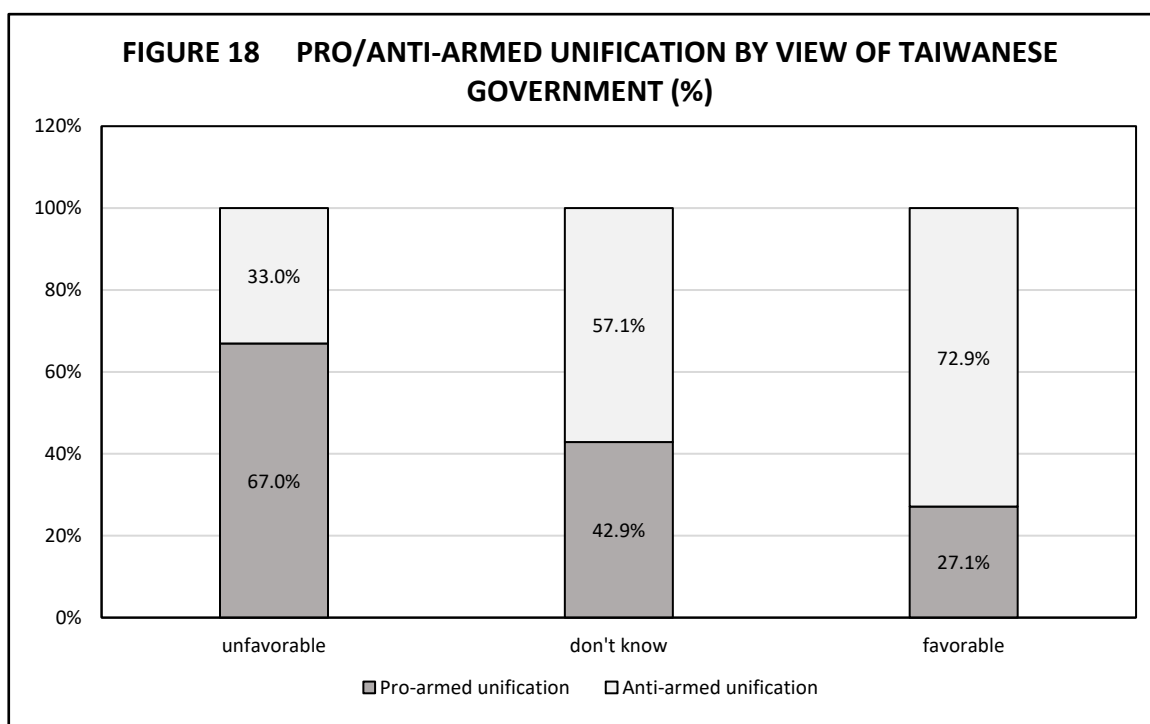
3.6 These findings seem to suggest that after cross-Strait tensions have lasted for about three years, the effect of Taiwan travel and in-person contact with Taiwanese has been reversed. The change could have been triggered by the anti-Beijing Sunflower movement in 2014, which threw the unpopularity of China in Taiwan in the

limelight. Public outcry for armed unification and criticism of the government's Taiwan policy for being too soft have been growing in China since.²²

- 3.7 The DPP's landslide victories in the 2014 local elections and the 2016 presidential and legislative elections further confirmed the estrangement. The significant change in Beijing's Taiwan policy from rapprochement to confrontation since 2016 have reinforced Chinese society's negative view of Taiwan, aggravated by the greatly increased media coverage of the DPP administration's various pro-independence policies and activities. In contrast, during the cross-Straits rapprochement of 2008-2013, there was less negative information about Taiwan from official media and the Chinese public's impression was that of a Taiwan getting closer to China.
- 3.8 While the improving cross-Straits relations in 2013 might have enhanced Chinese tourists' sensitivity to the similarities between the Taiwanese and themselves, the deteriorating relations might work the opposite way, accentuating the perceived differences between them. Understandably, the stronger sense of similarities may reduce support for armed unification, while perceived differences may work in contrary.²³
- 3.9 On respondents' view of the Taiwanese government and society, Figures 18 and 19 indicate that those with an unfavourable view of the Taiwanese government and society are more pro-armed unification than those with other views, particularly those with the favourable view. Specifically, 67% and 65% of respondents with unfavourable view of the Taiwanese government and society respectively are pro-armed unification, in contrast to 27.1% and 50.3% of those with favourable view.

²² Wu, Jianzhong, 2020. "Lihong Mingming Fan Da Cuo Weishenme Bu Daoqian Dalu Minyi Dishi Taiwan Qingxu Gaozhang Zhide Guancha" (Why didn't Li Hong apologise for her big mistake? The rising public sentiment in China against Taiwan is worth observing) Newtalk. 17 September 2020.

²³ Meng Chih-cheng, 2016. "Yue Ronghe Huo Yueshuli? Jiexi Dangqian Liangan Jiaoliu Xia Taiwan Minzhong Shenfen Rentong De Neihan." (Further Integration or Drifting Apart? Uncovering the Nature and Influence of the Taiwanese People's Self-Identity under the Circumstances of the Current Cross-Straits Exchange Relationship). *The Taiwanese Political Science Review*, Vol. 20 Issue 2. DOI:10.6683/TPSR.201612.20(2).187-262.

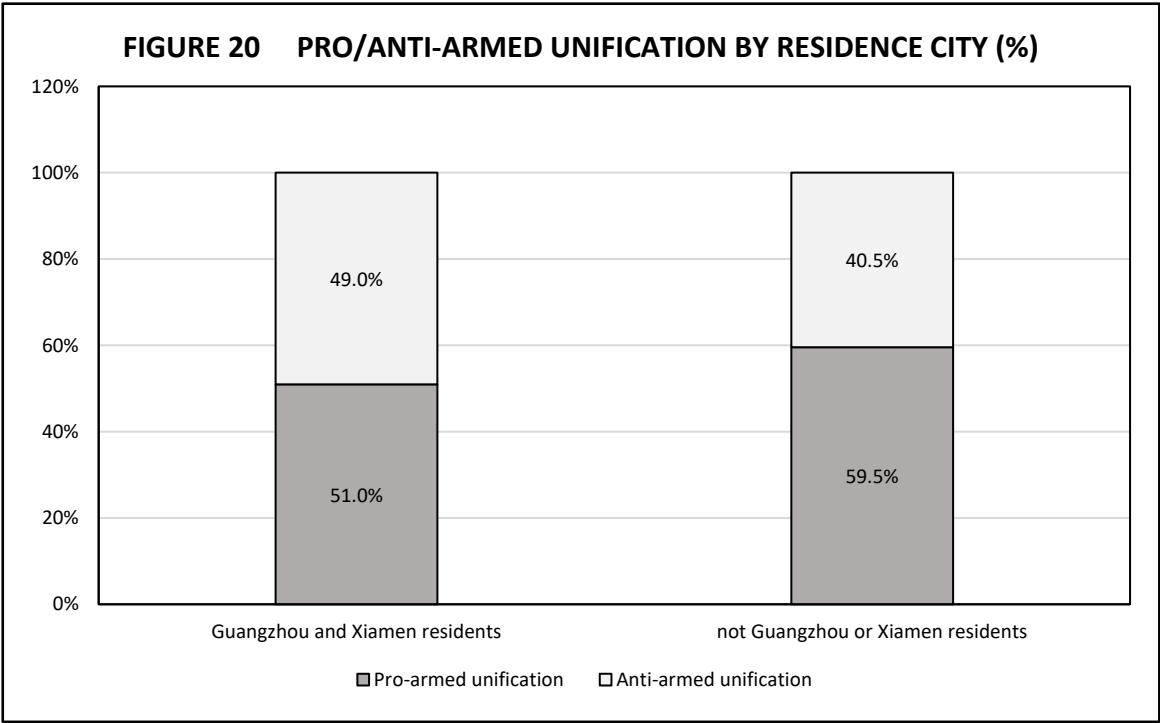


3.10 About six per cent of respondents have favourable view of the Taiwanese government, of which 72.9% are anti-armed unification. Interestingly, 57.1% of respondents who have no view of the Taiwanese government are also anti-armed unification. Apparently, the view of the Taiwanese government plays a divisive role in the respondents' attitude towards armed unification: While those with an unfavourable view of the Taiwanese government are more pro-armed unification,

those with other views are more anti-armed unification. Since 2016 mainland Chinese view of the Taiwanese government has worsened probably under the influence of mainland Chinese media as well.

Support for Armed Unification: Residence City

4.1 Among the nine surveyed cities, Guangzhou and Xiamen are the only two coastal cities that are closest to Taiwan geographically, economically and culturally; this could be a factor for residents’ attitude towards armed unification. Indeed, Figure 20 shows that Guangzhou and Xiamen residents are less pro-armed unification than residents of other cities (51% vs 59.5%) and lower than the nine-city average of 57.6% too. A statistical test (Chi-Square test) indicates that there is no significant difference between respondents’ views of armed unification in the two cities, suggesting that these respondents may be categorised as the same group on this issue.



4.2 Existing studies suggest that the coastal city’s higher dependence on foreign market may reduce its residents’ nationalism.²⁴ For Guangzhou and Xiamen residents,

²⁴ Lan, X. and B. G. Li (2015). “The Economics of Nationalism”. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 7(2): 294-325.

another factor at play could be their proximity to Taiwan where a war with Taiwan could impact the economies of Guangdong and Fujian provinces more severely.

- 4.3 Cultural similarities might also have contributed to their more friendly attitude towards Taiwan on the unification issue.²⁵ Most Taiwanese are the descendants of immigrants from Fujian and Guangdong provinces,²⁶ which are located near Taiwan but far from Beijing. Compared with other provinces, Fujian and Guangdong share more cultural similarities with Taiwan, such as dialects, customs and historical memories. The cultural similarities between the two provinces and Taiwan might be even higher than those between the two provinces and the seven inland provinces where the other seven surveyed cities are.²⁷ In a sense, Taiwan seems to be outside the in-group boundary for most mainland Chinese. However, to the residents in Fujian and Guangdong, this in-group boundary might be vague, indicating the possibility of another shared identity with Taiwanese. Higher cultural similarities may make Guangzhou and Xiamen residents more likely to see Taiwanese as part of an in-group, which may weaken their support for armed unification.²⁸

Implications and Prospect

- 5.1 The 2019 nine-city survey shows that the relatively privileged groups, including the male, better educated, high-incomers, Party members, urban *Hukou* holders, those with privileged occupations and those socially most active, are more pro-armed unification, and therefore, more in line with Beijing's Taiwan policy which has always seen armed unification as a possible option. This finding differs from

²⁵ Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969; Wang, Mingke, 1997. "Huaxia Bianyuan: Lishi Jiye Yu Zuqun Rentong" (The Edge of China: Historical Memory and Ethnic Identity). Taipei: Yunchen Press.

²⁶ China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification, 2016. "Renshi Taiwan Wenhua Goujian Liang'an Hexie Wenhua Guanxi" (Understanding Taiwanese Culture, Building Harmonious Cultural Relations Across the Taiwan Strait) http://www.zhongguotongcuhui.org.cn/hxzh/201612/t20161221_11659458.html, August 23, accessed 7 February 2021.

²⁷ Wang, Horng-Luen, Ke Zhang. "'RIP, 426': Jiexi Dalu Diqu Lutai Xueweisheng De Guozu Jingyan" ('RIP, 426': Analyzing 'National Experiences' of the Degree-Pursuing Mainland Students in Taiwan). *SOCIETAS: A Journal for Philosophical Study of Public Affairs*. No. 65, June 2018, pp. 1-88, DOI: 10.6523/SOCIETAS.201806_(65).001

²⁸ Johnston, A I (2017). "Is Chinese Nationalism Rising? Evidence from Beijing". *International Security* 41(3): 7-43.

previous findings that Chinese elites are more liberal and less nationalistic. It is likely that their nationalistic sentiments have grown, or they have different levels of nationalism on different issues.

- 5.2 Those who believe that China is better than Taiwan in politics and economy are more pro-armed unification too. It seems that public support for armed unification is rooted in a sense of privilege, pride and confidence, the underlying sentiments of Beijing's wolf warrior diplomacy in recent years. This probably implies that wolf warrior diplomacy is here to stay as it might have received support from the privileged population in China. Although the privileged are the minority, their political, economic and social influences in China are much stronger than the relatively less privileged, a factor that Beijing must consider in making its foreign and Taiwan policies.
- 5.3 The finding that those who have a better understanding of Taiwan and Taiwanese are more pro-armed unification also contradicts previous findings and popular belief. They include those who are interested in Taiwan news, know Tsai Ing-wen as Taiwan's president, have been to Taiwan and have in-person contact with Taiwanese. This seems to suggest that Chinese media's increasingly negative coverage of Taiwan since 2016, particularly on Tsai and her administration, has impacted Chinese urban residents greatly, raising their nationalistic sentiments against Taiwan, and in particular against the Taiwanese government. Nevertheless, Beijing could be over-mobilising the Chinese public who could become over nationalistic and imposing unwanted pressure on the government for more radical actions against Taiwan.²⁹
- 5.4 Probably due to geographic, economic and cultural proximity to Taiwan, Xiamen and Guangzhou residents are less supportive of armed unification. This has important implication for Beijing should it wage a war on Taiwan. Fujian and Guangdong will be the battlefield or the closest to it and the strongest public support will be imperative. Any armed unification moves will likely see Beijing mobilising public support in these two provinces long before the process starts.

²⁹ *Lianhe Zaobao*. 7 June 2021. "Afternoon Observation: What is the intention of the U.S. C-17 military aircraft to land in Taiwan?", <https://www.zaobao.com.sg/realtime/china/story20210607-1153228>, accessed 17 June 2021.