WHO SUPPORTS ARMED UNIFICATION WITH TAIWAN IN URBAN CHINA?

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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.