



Czech public opinion on China in the age of COVID-19

A divided nation

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The publication benefitted from further research assistance by Andrej Findor and Jiří Čenek, to whom the authors wish to express their gratitude.

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Summary

- This report is a result of a wide-scale **study of public opinion on China in 13 European countries**,¹ conducted in September and October 2020, on a research sample representative with respect to gender, age, level of education, country region, and settlement density.² Here, we focus on the **Czech portion of the polling**, building on the previously published report comparing the results across the 13 countries.³
- Overall, the Czech respondents have a predominantly **negative view of China** (56% negative, 30% positive, the rest being neutral) (*Figure 1*). A significant portion of the Czech population declared a change of its view on China in the last three years (*Figure 2*). However, only 11% changed its view to more positive, while **41% of respondents saw their views of China worsened**. As such, the Czech Republic is now one of the most China-negative countries in Europe and more negative than other Visegrad countries.
- China was the **third most negatively perceived country** from those surveyed (*Figure 3*). Only North Korea and Russia were rated more negatively, with Israel, U.S., and India being viewed similarly as China. On the other hand, the United Kingdom (61%), Japan (56%), and France (56%) are viewed the most positively.
- In general, these results may be seen as a **failure of political attempts** on China's side, as well on the side of some Czech politicians (led by President Zeman), to establish robust friendly Czech-China relations.
- The first association of the Czech public related to China is **communism** – making the Czech Republic the only one among the 13 surveyed countries with this topic at the top, and one of only a few not having the COVID-19 in the first place (*Figure 4*). Other common associations were the **populous country with mass production of low-quality goods**, the Great Wall, Chinese food, and COVID-19.

- **The Czech public is divided on China** across the political spectrum. The distinction is most visible in relation to the current Czech President **Miloš Zeman** and the late President **Václav Havel**. The voters of Mr. Zeman have a significantly more positive view of China (*Figure 22*), while those who consider Mr. Havel's legacy positively have a far more negative view of China (*Figure 21*). Subsequently, the respondents who see themselves as part of the West perceive China significantly more negatively than those who incline to the East (*Figure 20*). These results suggest that China has become a **symbol of political identity** within Czech politics.
- This difference is visible also among the **voters of political parties** (*Figure 18*). **The most negative views of China are held by the voters of TOP09**, followed by voters of ODS, STAN, Pirate Party, and the Social democratic party. Most positive views of China are among the voters of SPD, followed by the voters of the Communist Party and the governing ANO 2011. Interestingly, the voters of SPD are the only ones having predominantly positive views of China. A negative opinion prevails even among voters of the Communist party (39% negative, 30% positive). Overall, the divisions among the political parties in the Czech Republic are the **most significant when compared to all 13 surveyed countries**.
- These differences are also visible when it comes to the view of the Chinese people (*Figure 6*). The voters of **TOP09, Green party, KDU-ČSL, and ČSSD have the most negative view of the Chinese people**, while the most positive views are held by voters of SPD, followed by the voters of "Svobodní" (*Figure 19*). These results suggest that many Czech respondents translate their views of the Chinese Communist regime to the perceptions of the Chinese people.
- In terms of the perception of various China-related issues, Czech respondents think about **trade with China** slightly positively, making it the only China-related issue scoring with the prevailing positive views. On the contrary, the most negative feelings are held towards **China's impact on the global environment**, followed by **China's military**. Other issues, such as **China's Belt and Road Initiative** and **Chinese investments** are seen slightly negatively (*Figure 5*).

- China is seen as a **powerful international actor** in the Czech Republic. **Economically** speaking, China is regarded as the most powerful when compared to the U.S., EU, or Russia (*Figure 8*). In terms of its **importance for the Czech economic development**, China is seen as slightly more important than the U.S. and Russia. The EU is still considered as the most important for the Czech economy (*Figure 11*).
- When it comes to the **military**, China is seen as having approximately the same strength as the U.S. and Russia and being far ahead of the EU (*Figure 7*). China is also seen as about as **culturally attractive** as the EU - and more so than the U.S (*Figure 9*). and Russia. However, in terms of **human rights**, China scored the last one, with the EU being decisively first, ahead of the second U.S. and third Russia (*Figure 10*).
- **Most Czechs do not trust China.** Only one-tenth of the Czech respondents declared that they trust China, while 60% distrust it. On the contrary, most respondents trust the EU, followed by the U.S. and Russia (*Figure 12*).
- Subsequently, Czech respondents **do not want their country's foreign policy to be aligned with China** - only 26% prefer this option. Instead, most Czechs want to be aligned with the EU (64%), followed by the U.S. (46%), and Russia coming ahead of China with 31% of respondents (*Figure 13*).
- When it comes to **5G network development**, the majority of the population (64%) prefers to rely on EU producers, followed by those relying on Japanese producers (53%). Subsequently, 36% would agree with the U.S. cooperation and 33% with the cooperation with South Korean companies. Only 21% would cooperate with Chinese companies when it comes to building the 5G networks (*Figure 14*).
- Czech foreign policy priorities towards China according to the public should be **cooperation on global issues** like climate change, epidemics, and counter-terrorism (69%) and addressing cybersecurity (62%), followed by the promotion of trade and investment (59%) and support for advancing human rights and democratic reforms in China (55%) (*Figure 15*).

- **COVID-19** has been identified as **linked to China**, yet China is seen as providing a lot of help to the Czech Republic when dealing with the pandemic - even more so than the EU (*Figure 16*).
- Some Czech respondents are willing to consider conspiracy theories about the origin of COVID-19: 34% believe it was **artificially made in a Chinese laboratory and spread intentionally** and 16% think it was brought to China by the U.S. military. Also, 30% think that the virus spread because of Chinese people eating bats and other wild animals. Less than 30% believe in the scientific consensus that the virus jumped to humans naturally from animals (*Figure 17*).
- Only a **tenth of respondents believe that the Chinese position in the world has improved** as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, 34% of Czechs think that China has **gained economically** as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (*Figure 17*).

1 Feelings towards China and other countries

Figure 1: Feeling towards China among Czech respondents⁴

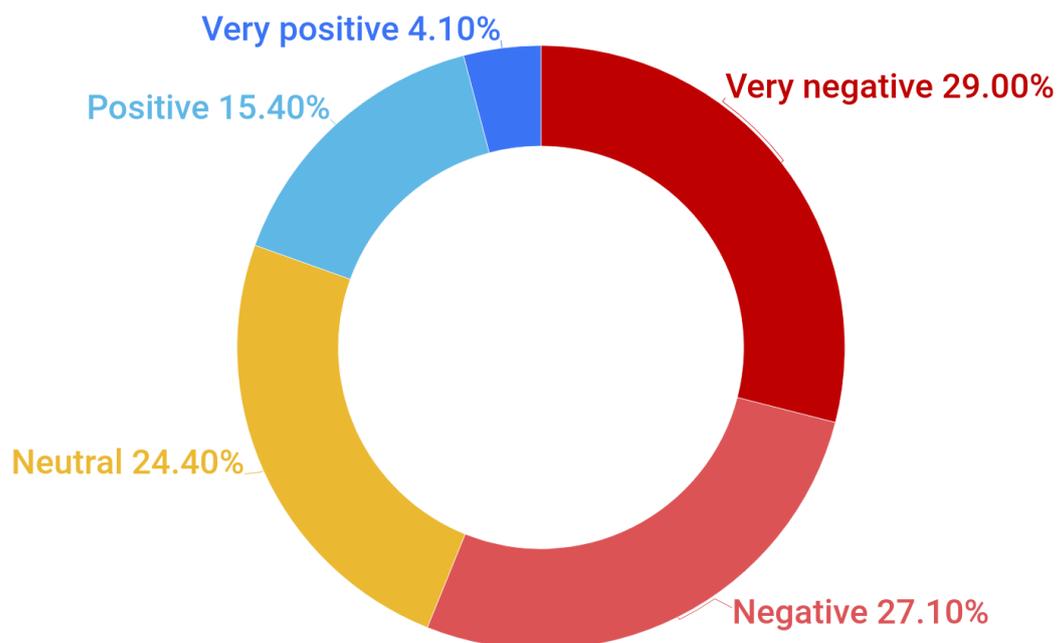


Figure 2: Change of feeling towards China among Czech respondents in the past three years⁵

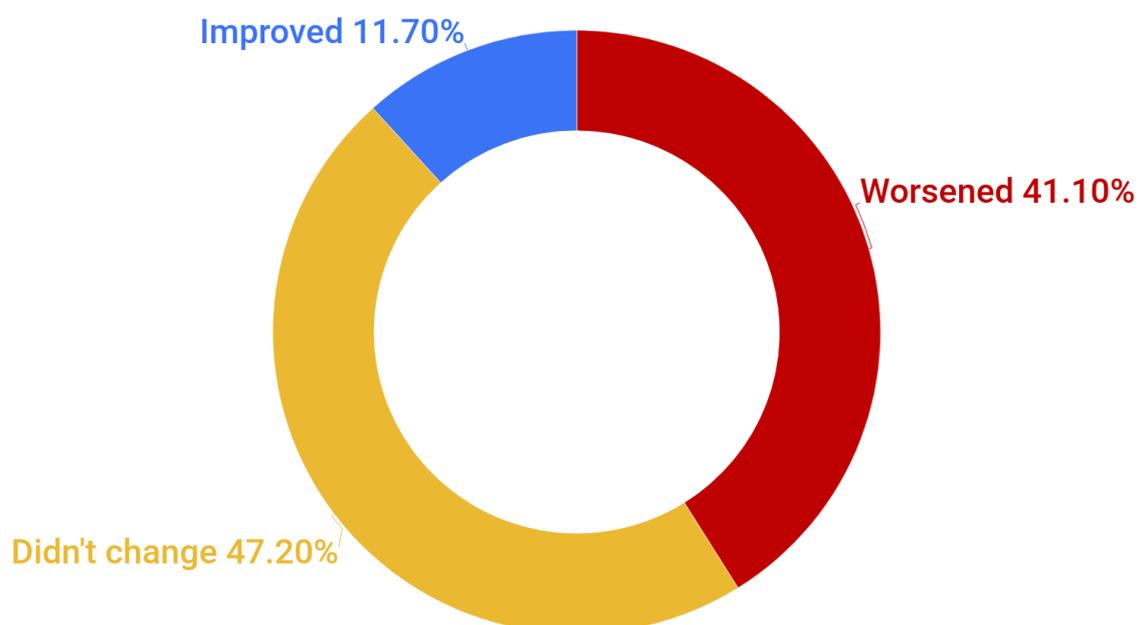


Figure 3: Feeling towards select countries among Czech respondents⁶

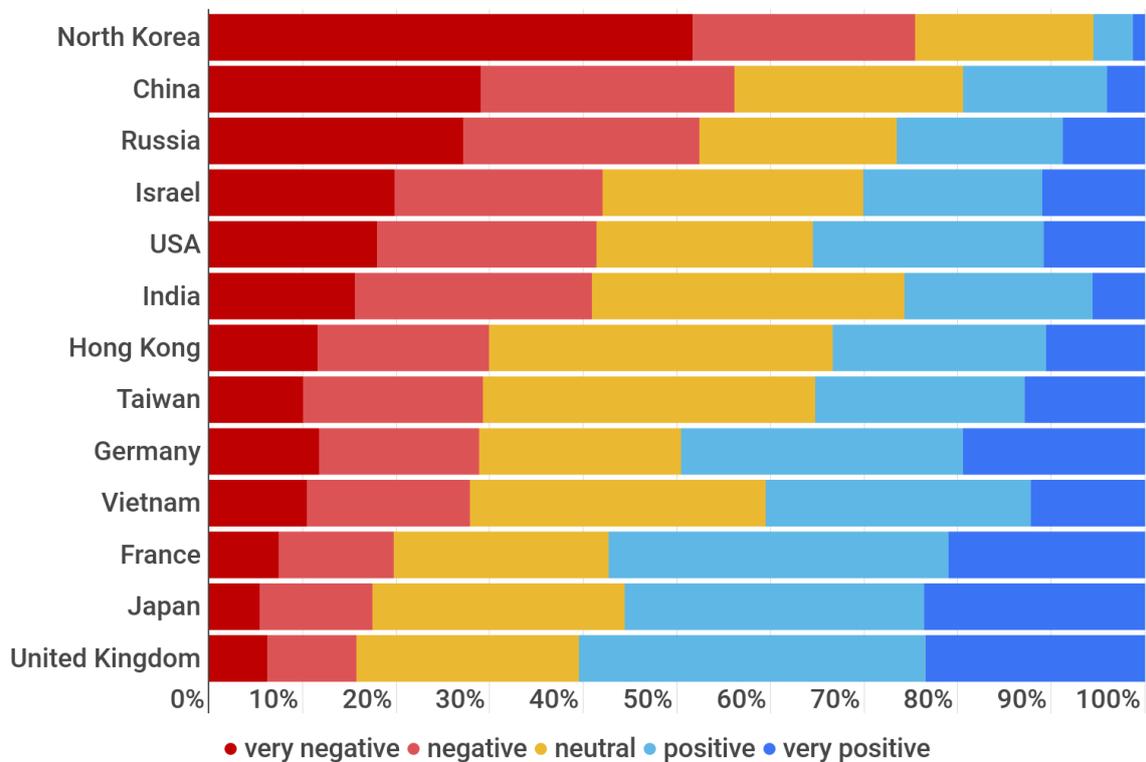


Figure 4: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when China is mentioned (most frequent answers, only 10+ mentions)?⁷



Figure 5: Perceptions of certain China-related issues among Czech respondents⁸

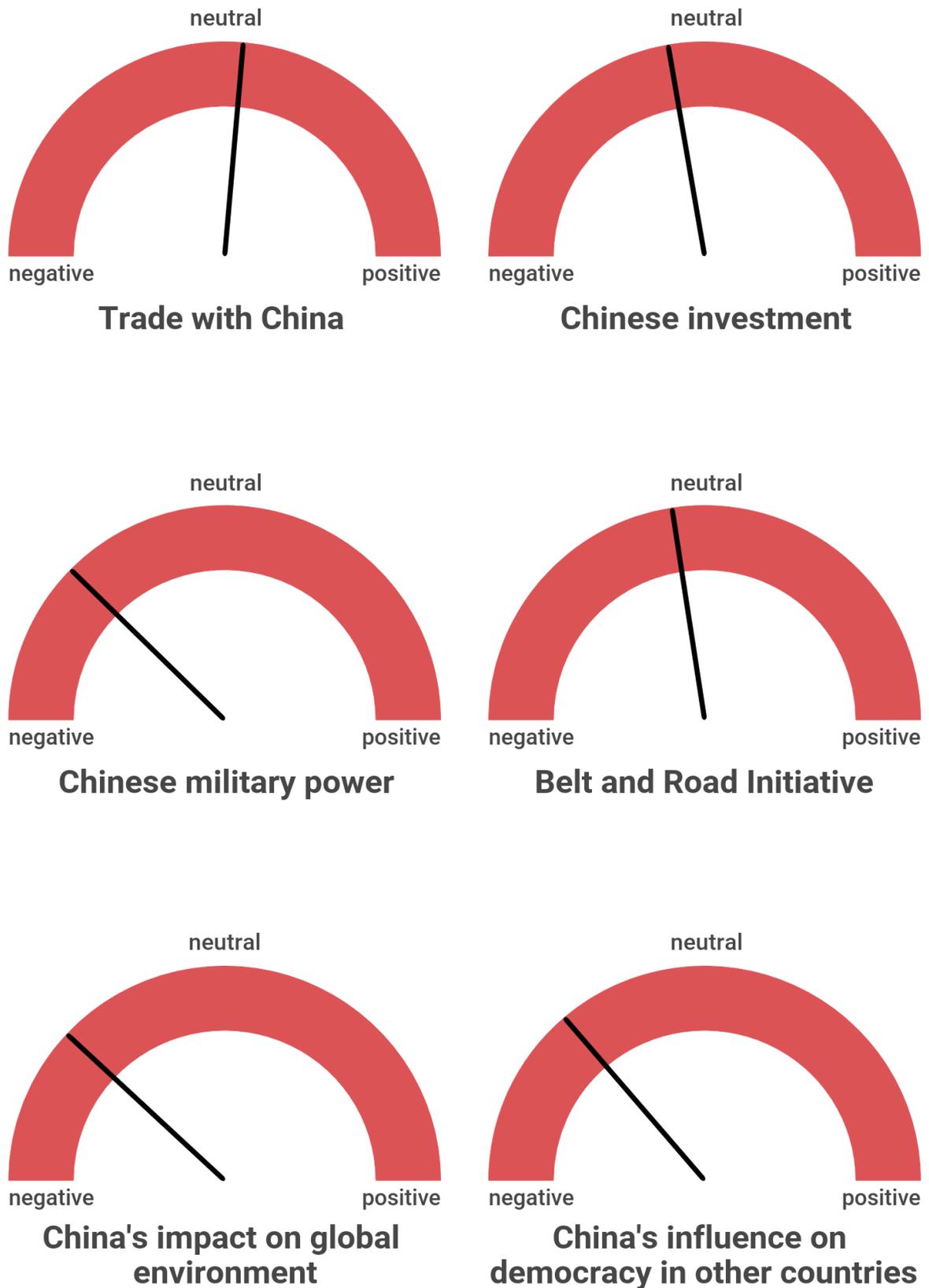
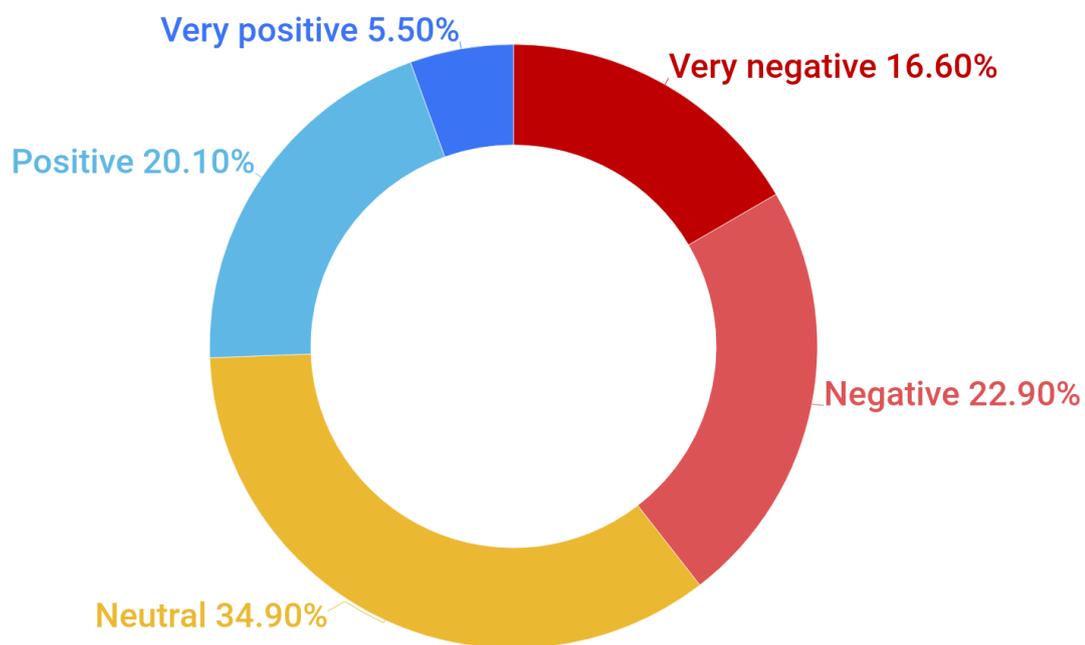


Figure 6: Feeling towards Chinese people among Czech respondents⁹



2 Comparing the global powers

Figure 7: How militarily strong do you consider the following countries/entities?

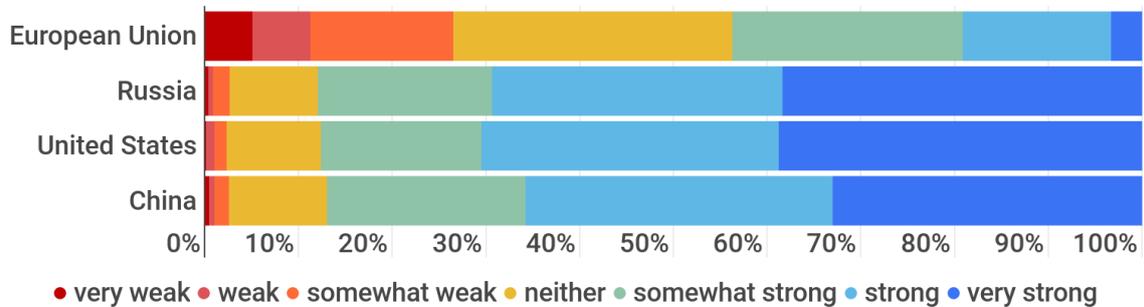


Figure 8: How economically strong do you consider the following countries/entities?

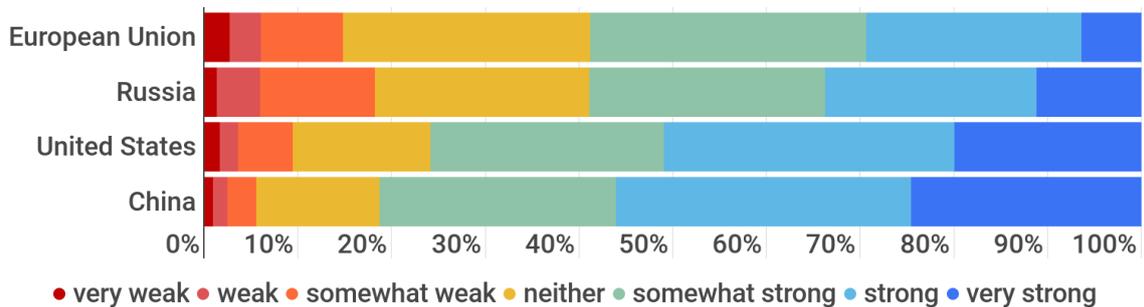


Figure 9: How culturally attractive do you consider the following countries/entities?

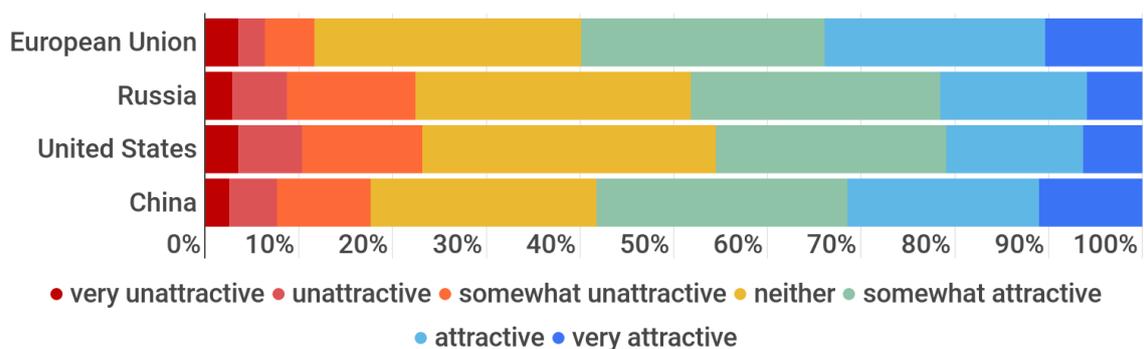


Figure 10: How do you evaluate the human rights situation in the following countries/entities?

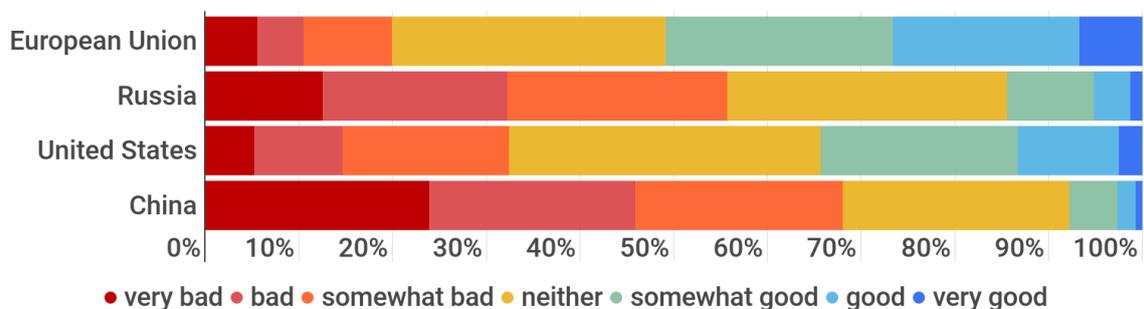


Figure 11: How important are the following countries/entities to the economic development of Czechia?

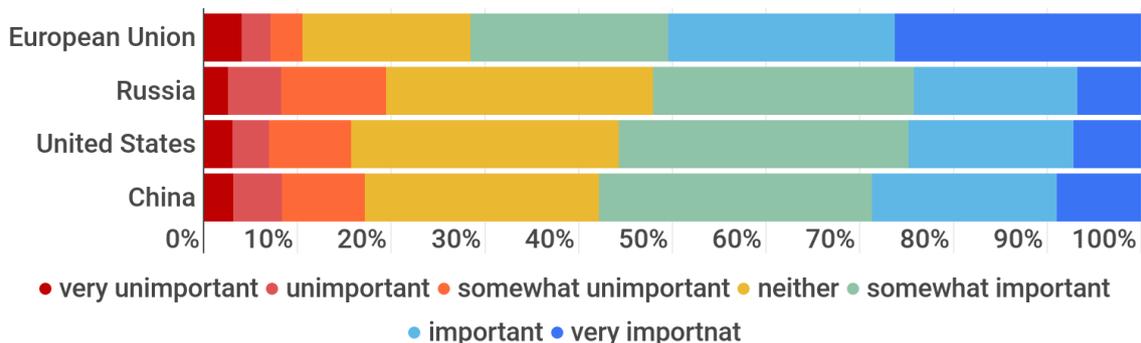
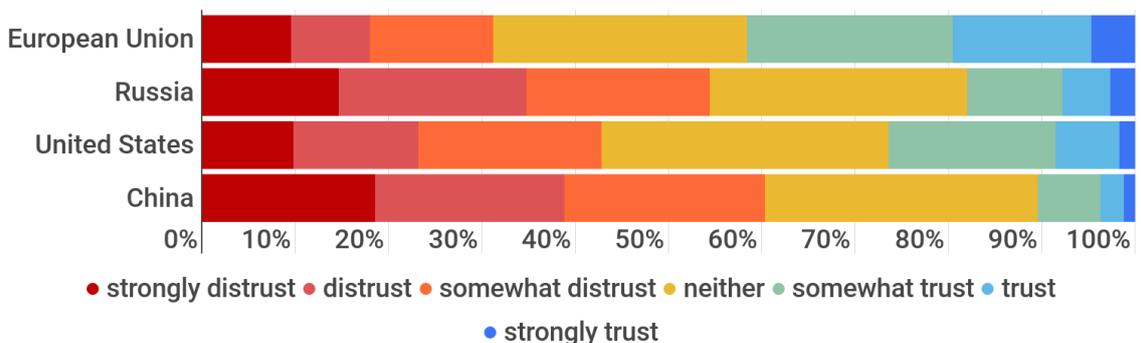


Figure 12: How much do you trust the following countries/entities?



3 Czech foreign policy towards China

Figure 13: How closely should Czech foreign policy be aligned with the policy of the following actors? (0=not at all; 10=completely)¹⁰

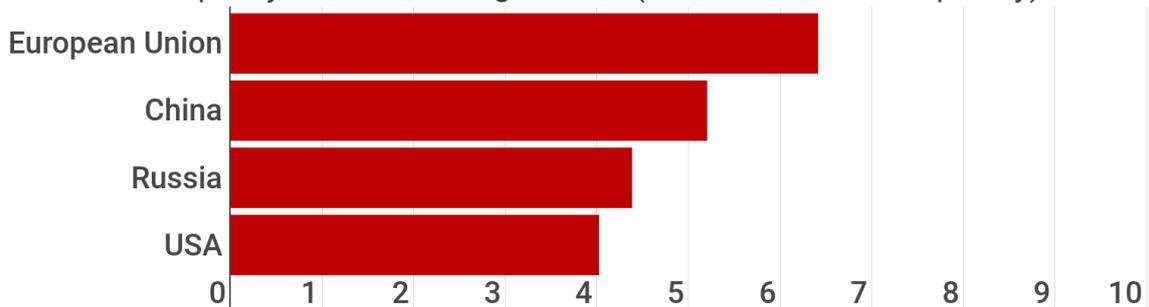


Figure 14: Should Czechia cooperate with the following countries in building its 5G network? (% of respondents agreeing)

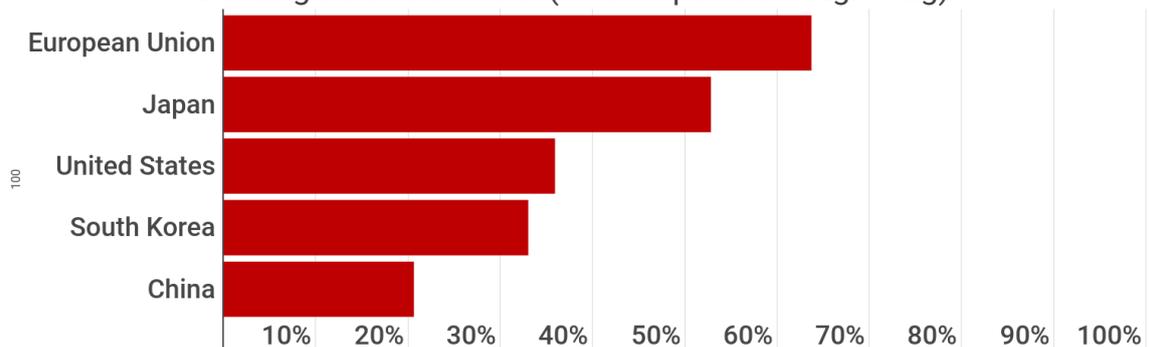
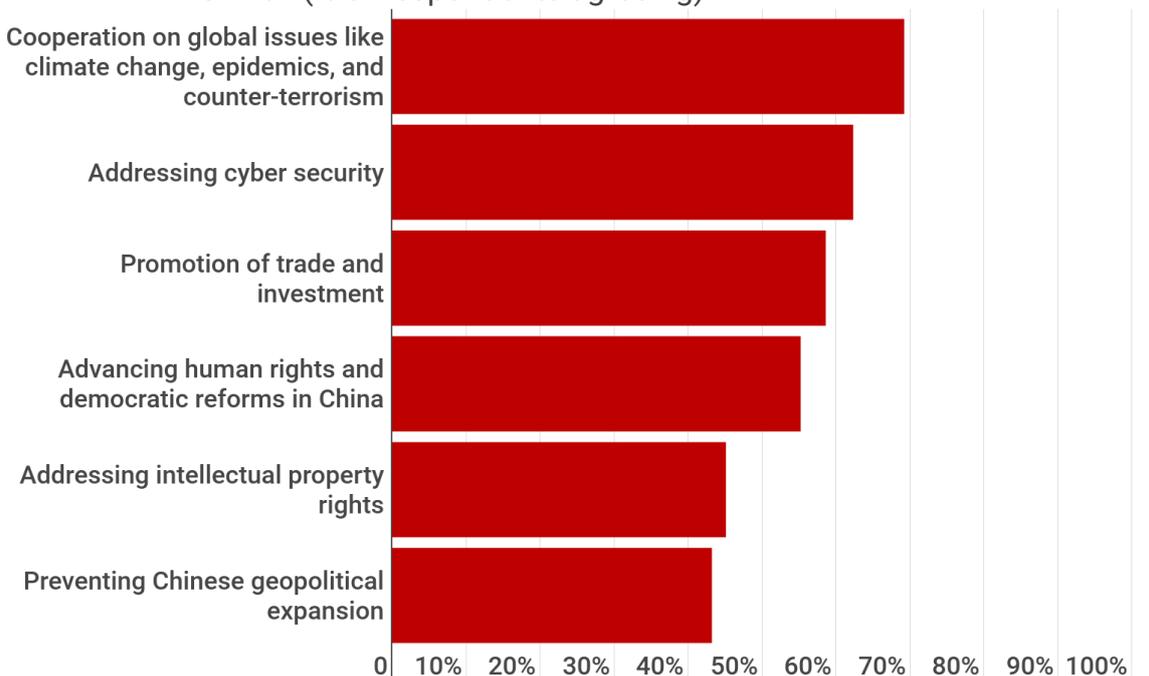


Figure 15: What should be Czech foreign policy priorities towards China? (% of respondents agreeing)



4 COVID-19 pandemic

Figure 16: How much did the following countries/entities help Czechia during the COVID-19 pandemic?¹¹

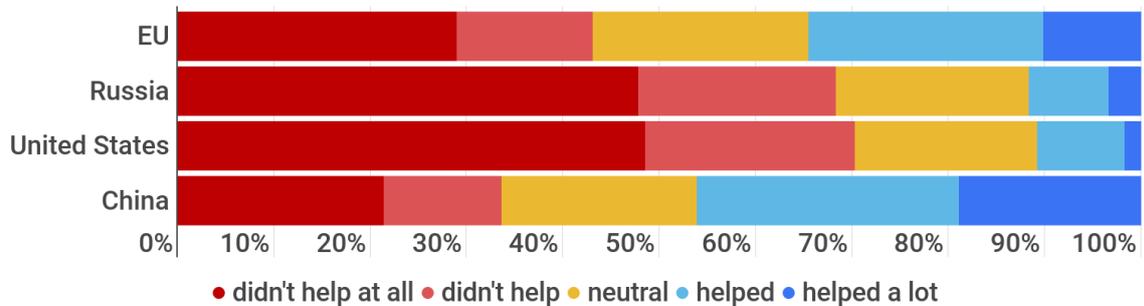
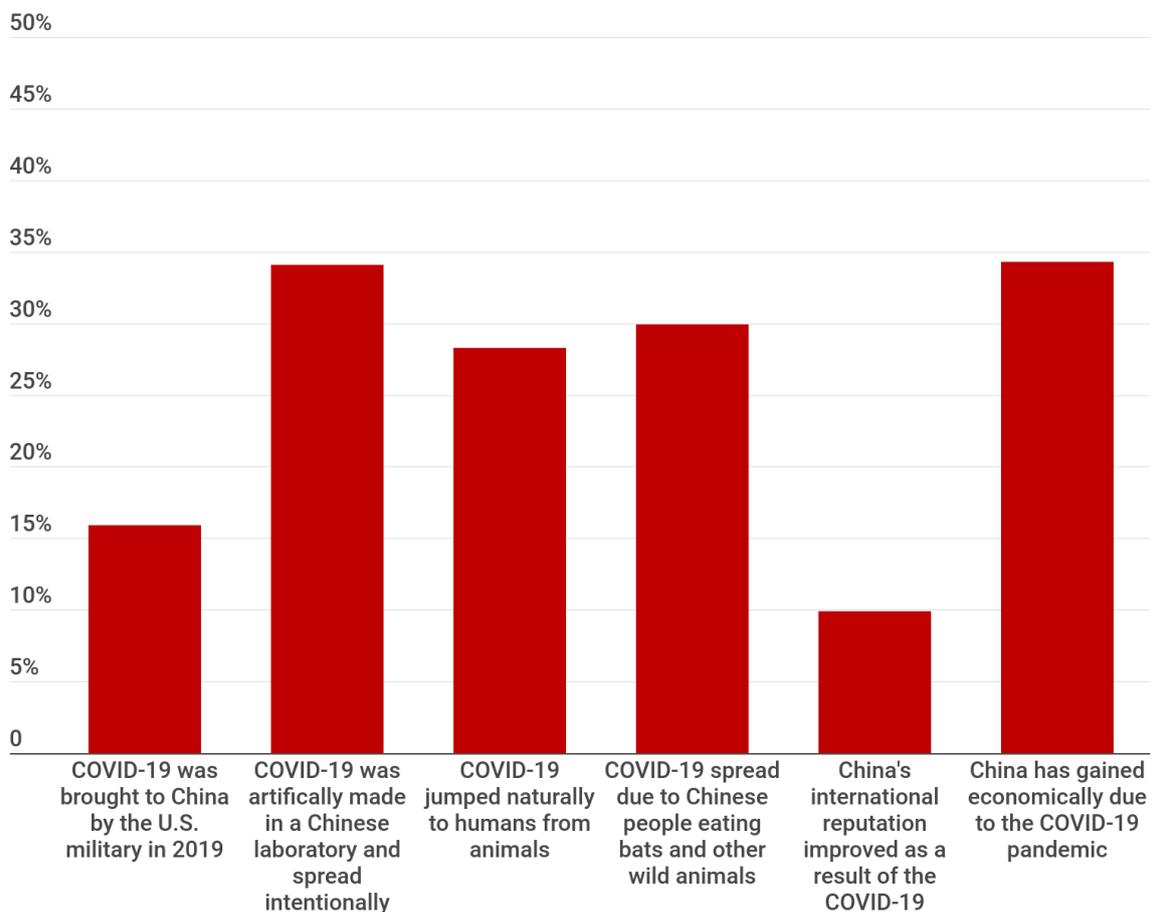


Figure 17: Czech views on the COVID-19 pandemic (% of respondents agreeing)



5 Views of China & political affiliation

Figure 18: Feelings on China among voters of political parties polling over 5%¹²

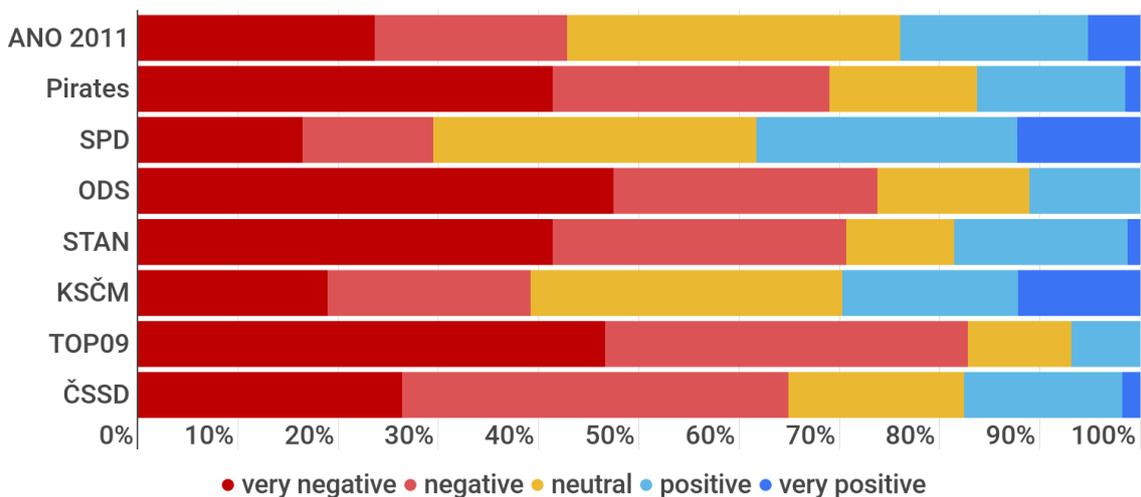


Figure 19: Feelings on Chinese people among voters of political parties polling over 5%¹³

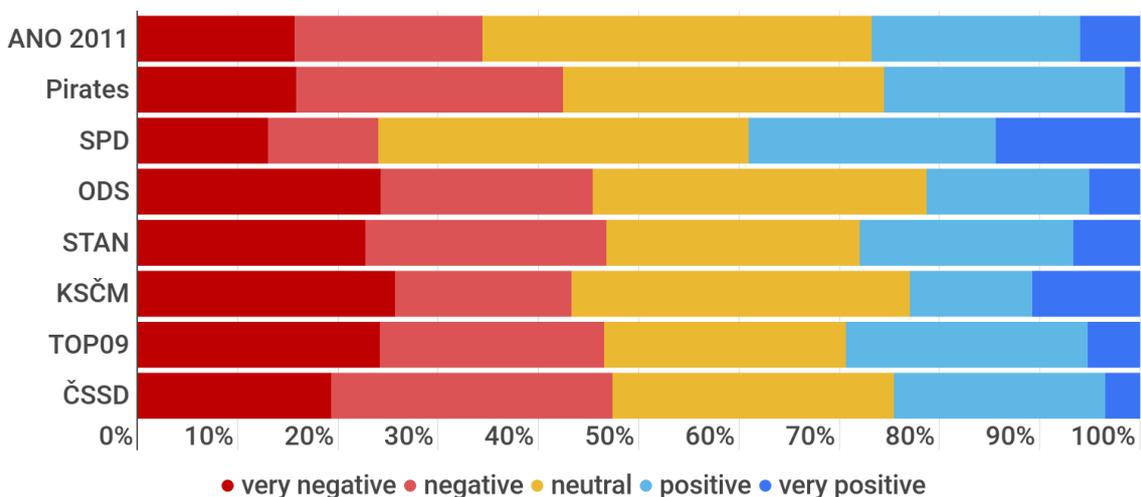


Figure 20: Feelings on China according to respondents' self-identification with the global West or global East¹⁴

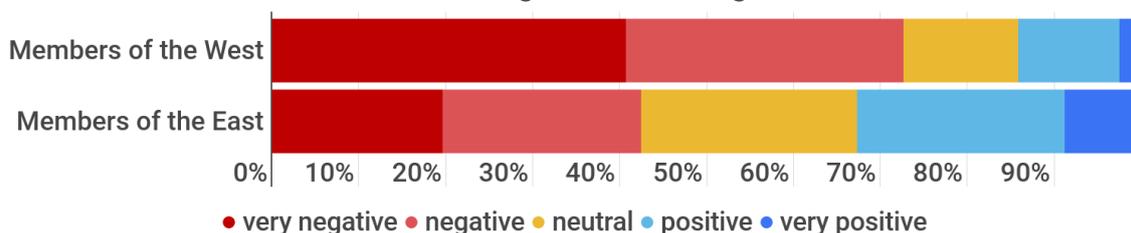


Figure 21: Feelings on China according to respondents' perception of the legacy of President Václav Havel¹⁵

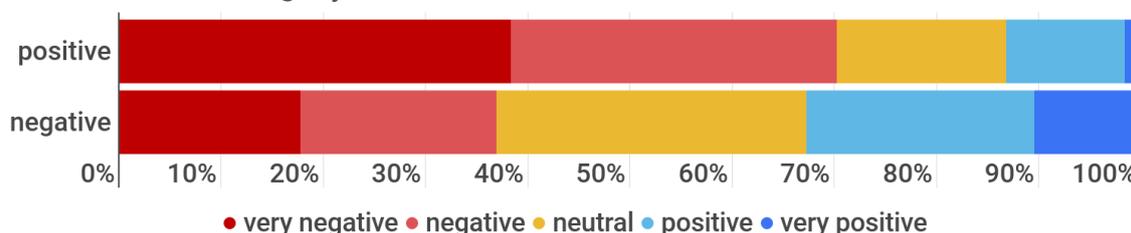


Figure 22: Feelings on China according to respondents' vote in the last Presidential elections¹⁶

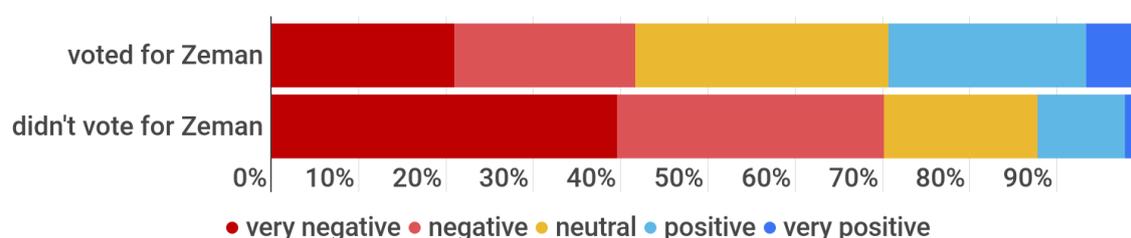
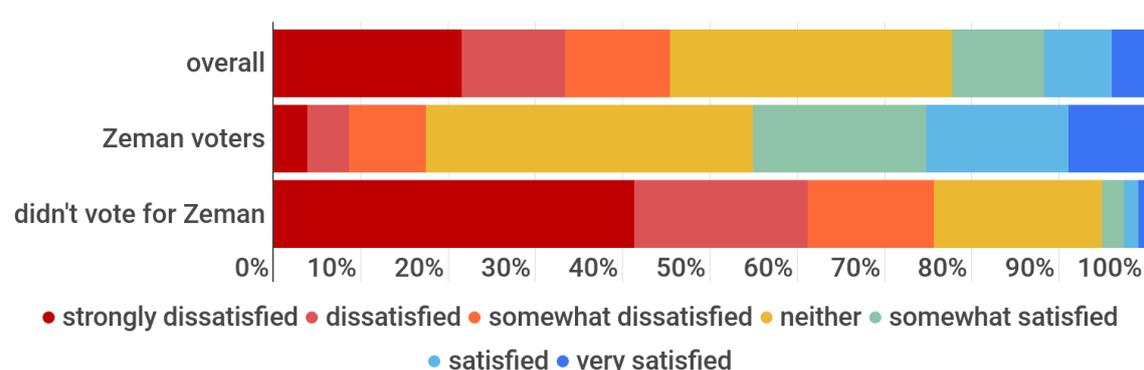


Figure 23: Satisfaction with President Miloš Zeman's policy towards China¹⁷



Endnotes

- ¹ Turcsányi, Richard Q., Renáta Sedláková, Jiří Čeněk, Kristina Kironská, Andrej Findor, Ondrej Buchel, Matej Hruška, Adrian Brona, Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova, Mario Esteban, Beatrice Gallelli, Jelena Gledic, Peter Gries, Sergei Ivanov, Björn Jerdén, Marc Julienne, Tamás Matura, Tim Rühlig, and Tim Summers. 2020. "Sinophone Borderlands Europe Survey." Palacky University Olomouc. Preparation of the dataset has been supported by the European Regional Development Fund Project "Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges", CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000791.
- ² N = 1506; unless indicated otherwise, all charts in this report calculate with this number of respondents in the survey. The sample is representative of the Czech population from age 18 to 70 with respect to gender, age, education, settlement within the country, region, settlement density, and size of settlement. Data was collected online in September and October 2020.
- ³ Richard Q. Turcsányi, Matej Simalcík, Kristína Kironská, Renáta Sedláková, Jiří Čeněk, Andrej Findor, Ondrej Buchel, Matej Hruska, Adrian Brona, Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Cerenkova, Mario Esteban, Beatrice Gallelli, Jelena Gledic, Peter Gries, Sergei Ivanov, Björn Jerdén, Marc Julienne, Tamás Matura, Tim Rühlig, Tim Summers (2020). *European public opinion on China in the age of COVID-19: Differences and common ground across the continent*. Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc.
- ⁴ Feelings towards China (and other countries) have been measured on a 0 (negative) to 100 (positive) scale. The responses were grouped as "negative" (incl. very negative: 0-20 and negative: 21-45), "neutral" (46-54) and "positive" (incl. positive: 55-79 and very positive: 80-100).
- ⁵ Respondents were offered 7 options: much worse; worse; slightly worse; neither worse nor better; slightly better; better; much better. "Worsened" includes options much worse; worse; slightly worse. "Did not change" includes option neither worse nor better. "Improved" includes options slightly better; better; much better.
- ⁶ Supra note 4 (mutatis mutandis).
- ⁷ The respondents were asked an open-ended question "What first comes to mind when you hear about China?" The answers provided by 10 or more respondents are visualized.
- ⁸ Feelings towards China-related issues have been measured on a 0 (negative) to 100 (positive) scale. The chart shows the mean value for each characteristic.
- ⁹ Feelings towards Chinese people have been measured on a 0 (negative) to 100 (positive) scale. The responses were grouped as "negative" (incl. very negative: 0-20 and negative: 21-45), "neutral" (46-54) and "positive" (incl. positive: 55-79 and very positive: 80-100).
- ¹⁰ Desired foreign policy alignment has been measured on a 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely) scale. The chart shows the mean value for each country.
- ¹¹ Perceived COVID-19 help provided by the mentioned entities has been measured on a 0 (didn't help) to 10 (helped a lot) scale. The responses were grouped as "didn't help at all" (0-2), "didn't help" (3-4), "neutral" (5), "helped" (6-7), and "helped a lot" (8-10).
- ¹² Supra note 4 (mutatis mutandis). N-values of the political parties are as follows: ANO2011 – 250; Pirates – 203; SPD – 146; ODS – 99; STAN – 75; KSČM – 74; TOP09 – 58; ČSSD – 57.
- ¹³ Supra note 19.
- ¹⁴ Supra note 4 (mutatis mutandis). N-values for the categories are: members of the West: 600; members of the East: 285.
- ¹⁵ Supra note 4 (mutatis mutandis). N-values for the categories are: positive: 747; negative: 390.
- ¹⁶ Supra note 4 (mutatis mutandis). N-values for the categories are: voted for Zeman: 569; didn't vote for Zeman: 620.
- ¹⁷ N-values for the categories are: voted for Zeman: 569; didn't vote for Zeman: 620.

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About Sinophone Borderlands

The Sinophone Borderlands - Interaction at the Edges is an excellent research project based at the Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic. The project is funded by the European Regional Development Fund, project no. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000791.

The main idea of the project is to explore how the Chinese-speaking world interacts with other worlds, including those at its border (Slavophone, Tibetophone, Turco-Persophone, or Austroasiatophone worlds), as well as those who may be more distant (such as Anglophone, Hispanophone, Francophone, and others).

The Sinophone Borderlands research team consists of researchers from various disciplines under three main Research Groups - Political Science, Anthropology, and Linguistics. This allows for a cross-disciplinary dialogue and cross-cultural comparisons which pushes the academic studies of China and Asia beyond the limits of current disciplinary and national frameworks.

The Sinophone Borderlands is a research project that engages primarily in activities such as publishing academic journal articles, books, or participating in conferences and workshops.

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Editor: Richard Q. Turcsányi

Layout and cover design: Matej Šimalčík

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Published by:

Palacký University Olomouc
Křížkovského 8, 771 47 Olomouc, Czechia
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ISBN: 978-80-244-5819-9 (UPOL)

ISBN: 978-80-973816-0-8 (CEIAS)



ISBN 978-80-244-5819-9 (UPOL)
ISBN 978-80-973816-0-8 (CEIAS)