



Public attitudes in Taiwan-V4 relations

Solid basis, space for improvement

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Introduction

This report presents an analysis of public opinions in Taiwan and the Visegrad countries (Poland, Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia) – the V4 – about their mutual perceptions. It will also discuss the impacts of these attitudes on the mutual (non-diplomatic) relationships between the two sides and the potential impacts on their relationships with China. Based on this data and subsequent analysis, the report will offer policy suggestions on the role of public diplomacy in Taiwan-V4 relations.

This report is based on the unique public opinion survey data produced in partnership with the Sinophone Borderlands project of the Palacky University Olomouc.¹ In Taiwan,² the survey was conducted between April and June 2022 with a research sample of 1,350 respondents representative of the general population based on the quotas of gender, age (18-65 years), and region.³ In the V4 countries,⁴ the surveys were conducted between September and October 2020 with a research sample of over 1500 respondents in each country representative of the general population based on the quotas of gender, age (18-70 years), region, education, and urban-rural divide.⁵

Overall, there is **limited mutual knowledge and awareness** among Taiwan and the V4 countries. However, there are **positive trends that both sides can build upon** to improve their images further. In Taiwan, the V4 countries are already seen positively – although less so than countries such as Japan, Australia, Germany, Singapore, or the US. It was also determined that higher education and political interest, among other factors, correlate with more positive views of the V4 countries.

In turn, Taiwan is perceived neutrally among the V4 countries. Nonetheless, there are several noteworthy divisions within the countries and their societies, which suggest that **those with more awareness and knowledge of Taiwan tend to be more positive toward it.**

Also of interest are divisions based on political party affiliation. In Taiwan, voters of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) are more favorable toward the V4 countries than voters of the Kuomintang (KMT). Among the V4 countries, **political divisions are especially visible in Czechia and Slovakia** and, to a lesser degree, in Poland. Interestingly, there are no visible differences

between voters of Hungary's governing Fidesz party and its opposition, despite Prime Minister Orban's cozying up to China and Russia over the past decade.

Our findings overall suggest that efficient public diplomacy, which would spread awareness about Taiwan and the V4 countries on both sides, can further improve the mutual image and understanding between the two sides.

V4 attitudes towards Taiwan

Generally, feelings toward Taiwan were neutral in all four Visegrad countries (see Figures 1-4). Polish and Czech respondents tended to be slightly more favorable toward Taiwan than Hungarian and Slovak respondents. Polish respondents were the most positive about Taiwan, with 36% expressing positive or very positive feelings and only 27% expressing negative or very negative ones. Accordingly, the average sentiment among Polish respondents towards Taiwan stood at 53 (where 0 stands for the most negative sentiment, 100 for the most positive, and 50 for neutral).⁶

In Czechia, 34% of respondents expressed a positive or very positive sentiment toward Taiwan, with 30% expressing a negative or very negative one. Correspondingly, the overall average sentiment expressed toward the latter stood at 52. In Slovakia, only 27% expressed a positive or very positive sentiment, with a higher share (36%) expressing a negative or very negative one. The average sentiment was also lower than in Czechia, at 46 out of 100. The share of positive respondents was identical in Hungary, with 27% expressing positive or very positive sentiments and 36% negative or very negative ones. The average sentiment was broadly similar in Slovakia, standing at 47.

Taiwan's neutral perception remains true when compared to perceptions toward other actors, as it was not among the most positively perceived states in any of the V4 countries. While usually perceived less positively than Western democratic countries and Japan, Taiwan was not among the most negatively viewed countries either, as it generally outscored authoritarian or polarizing countries such as North Korea, Russia, China, Israel, and even the US, in some cases.

Also noteworthy is the relatively large group of respondents who had neutral views of Taiwan compared to neutral perceptions of other actors. This suggests that many people lack a clear position on and knowledge of Taiwan compared to other powers such as Russia and the US. Moreover, comparing perceptions toward Taiwan and Japan suggests that a potential exists to improve Taiwan's image in the region by utilizing public diplomacy tools.⁷

Figure 1: Perceptions towards various countries in Poland (% of respondents)

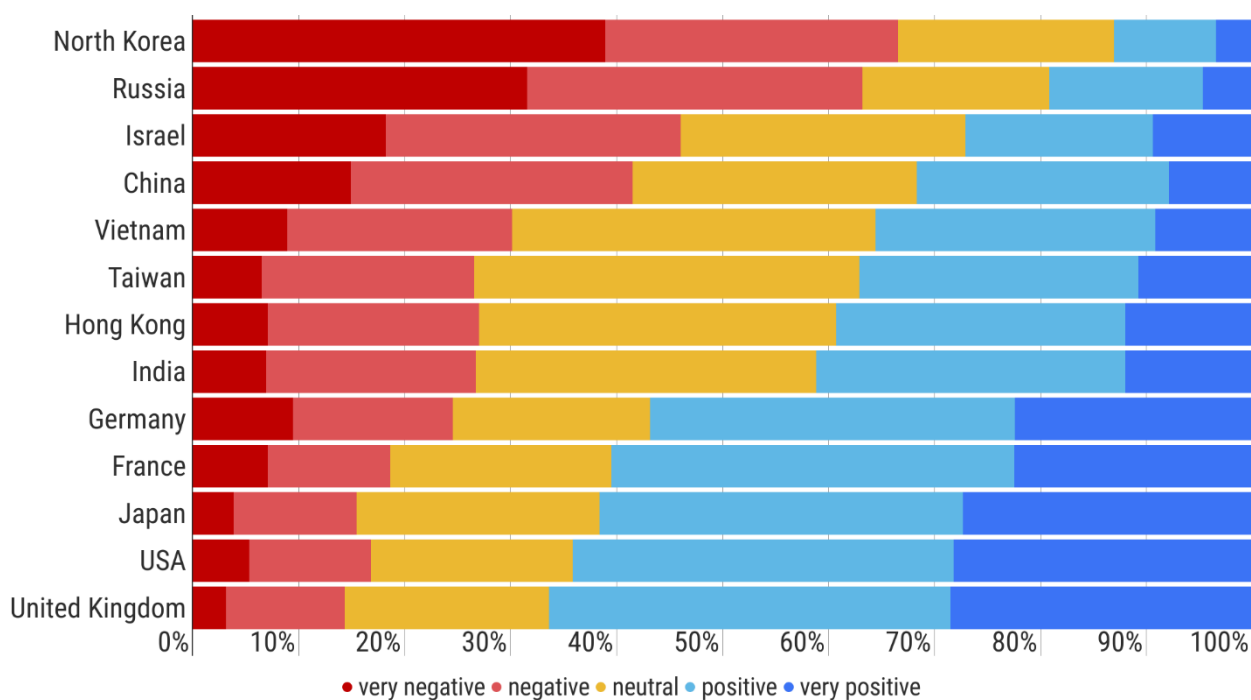


Figure 2: Perceptions towards various countries in Czechia (% of respondents)

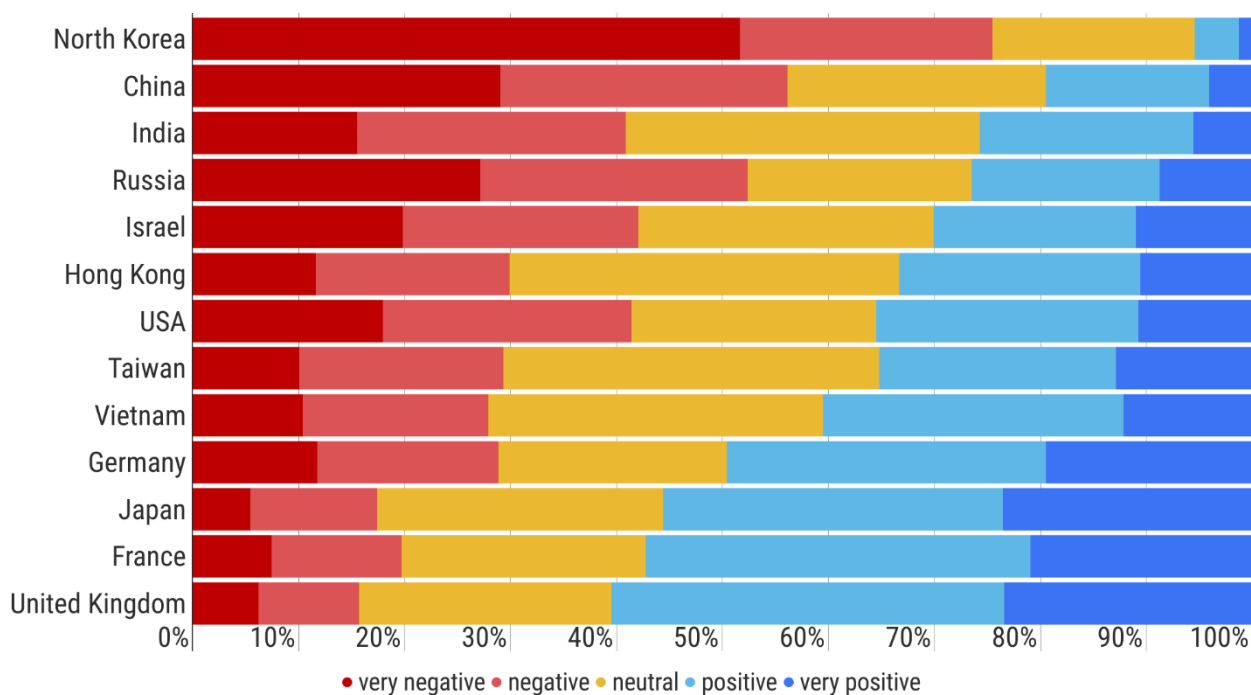


Figure 3: Perceptions towards various countries in Slovakia (% of respondents)

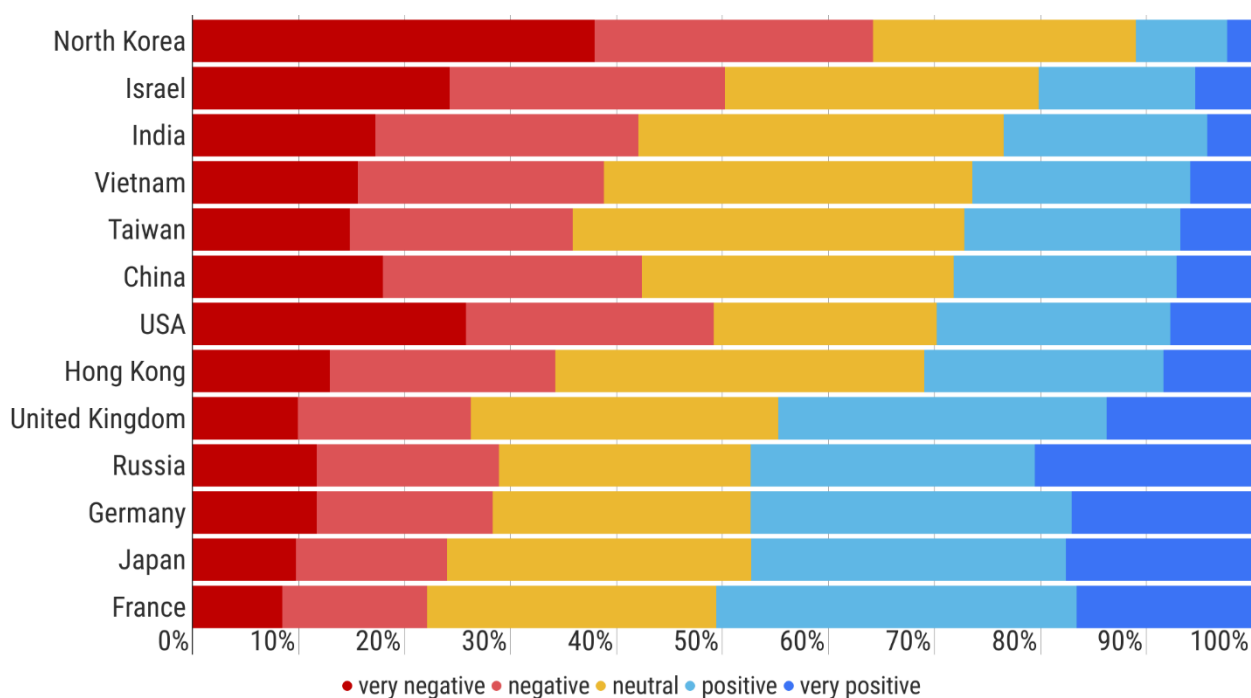
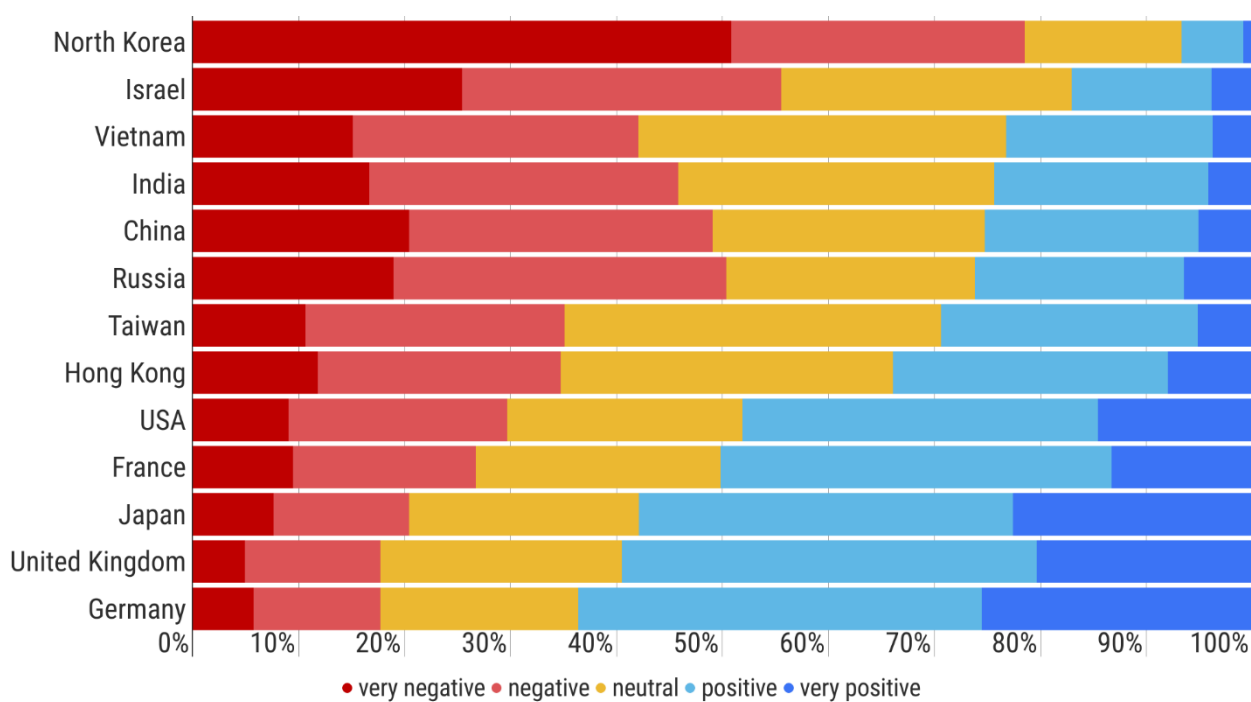


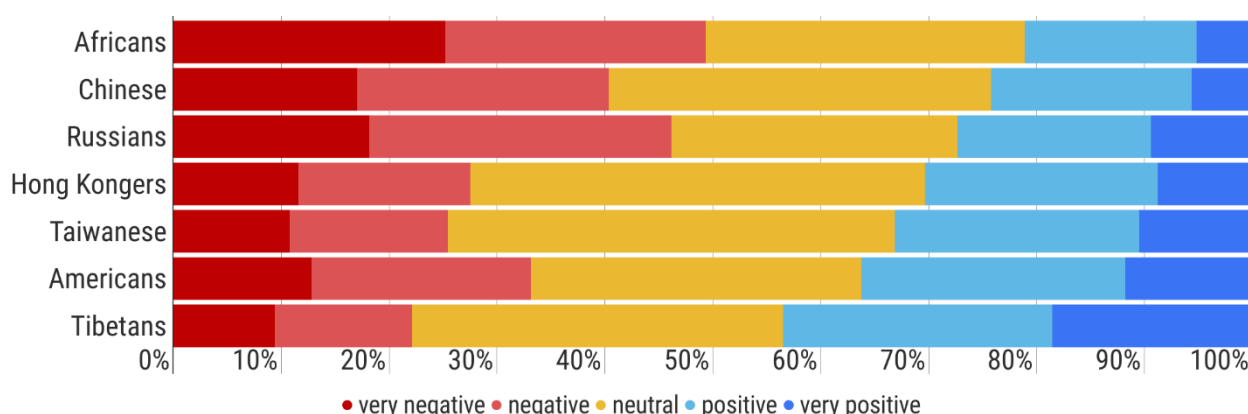
Figure 4: Perceptions towards various countries in Hungary (% of respondents)



Another question from the survey regarding the general attitude towards some specific groups of people gives further information on how Taiwan and the Taiwanese are seen in the V4 countries (see Figures 5-8). It seems that the V4 countries differ quite substantially concerning perceptions of some 'sensitive' countries and their related populations (such as Russians and Americans). At the same time, perceptions of Taiwanese people seem to be relatively similar across the V4 countries, again oscillating near the neutral mark with only a slight deviation between subgroups.

In Czechia, Tibetans and Americans are seen the most positively. Indeed, 44% and 36% of respondents expressed positive or very positive sentiments toward the two groups, respectively. In contrast, only 21% and 33% expressed negative feelings towards each. After Tibetans and Americans, the Taiwanese represented the third most favorably viewed group in the country, with 34% of Czech respondents expressing positive views toward them and only 26% expressing negative ones.

Figure 5: Perceptions towards various groups in Czechia (% of respondents)



In Slovakia, Russians were the most positively seen group of people, substantially ahead of the Tibetans and Americans, with 49% positive or very positive and only 24% negative or very negative perceptions. This is in line with the long-held positive views of Russia (and, in turn, negative of the US) held among a substantial part of the Slovak population, confirmed by other similar surveys. Taiwanese people were seen nearly as favorably as both mainland Chinese and Hong Kongers, with 27-28% expressing favorable or very favorable views towards each of these groups. Africans were the most unfavorably perceived group, with only about 22% of those surveyed expressing favorable or very favorable views toward them.

Figure 6: Perceptions towards various groups in Slovakia (% of respondents)

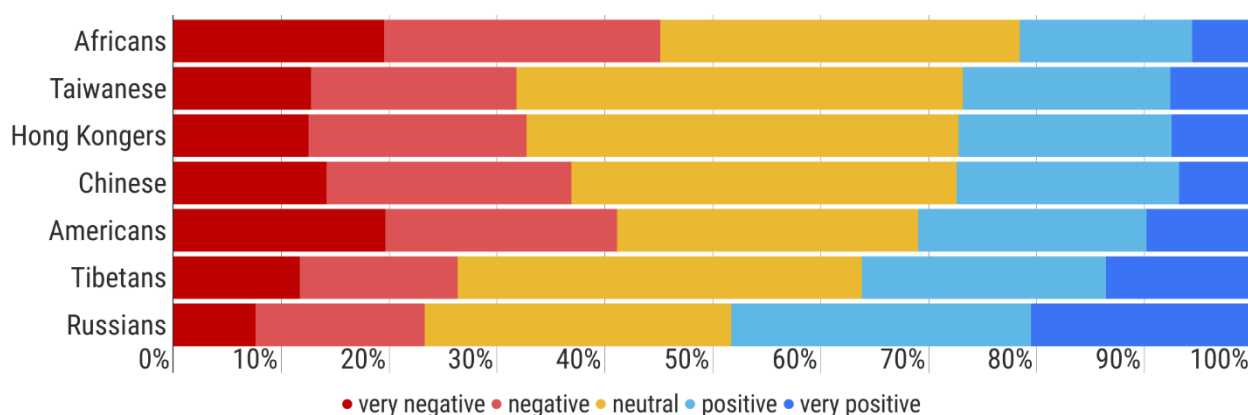
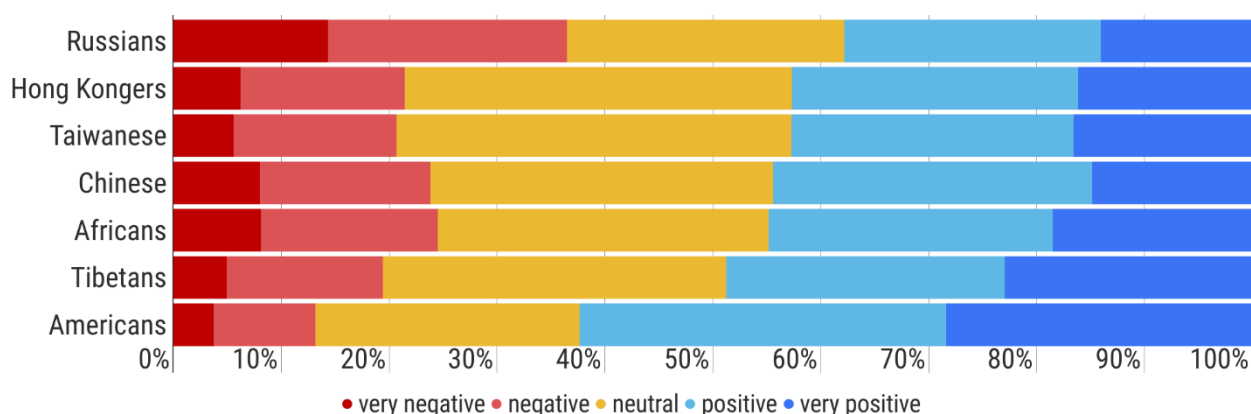


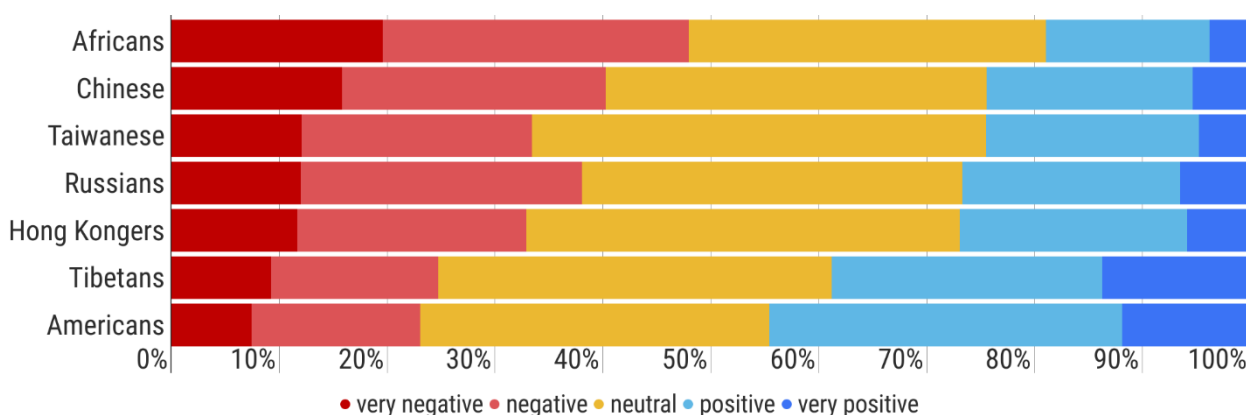
Figure 7: Perceptions towards various groups in Poland (% of respondents)



In Poland, Americans were the most positively seen group by far, with 62% of respondents expressing positive or very positive views towards them. Most other population groups, including Taiwanese, fell at more or less similar levels of favorability (40-50%). Russians were the only group falling below this level, with only 38% of Polish respondents expressing positive or very positive views toward them - in line with historic experiences between the two countries.

Finally, Hungary was similar to Poland in that Americans represented the most popular population group by far, with 45% expressing positive or very positive views and only 23% expressing negative or negative ones. Tibetans were the second best-perceived group, with 39% expressing positive or very positive favorability toward them. All other population groups, including Taiwanese, fell at a relatively similar level of support, with 20-30% of respondents expressing favorable or very favorable views.

Figure 8: Perceptions towards various groups in Hungary (% of respondents)



Results from the V4's perceptions toward the Taiwanese confirm existing notions of their non-diplomatic relations and give some further nuances on how Taiwan is seen in the V4 countries compared to other actors. It confirms that the V4 respondents likely do not possess a clear opinion of Taiwan and the Taiwanese, likely lacking the knowledge and direct contact with the country and its people.

It is interesting to note that Tibetans are among the most positively seen groups of people (from among those asked about in this question) and are seen substantially more positively than the Taiwanese. Moreover, the V4 respondents do not seem to differentiate much between the Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hongkongese – again, in contrast to their differentiation of the Tibetans. Overall, this may again point to an existing opportunity to improve the image of Taiwan and the Taiwanese in the V4 countries.

Sociological analysis of V4 attitudes towards Taiwan

To better understand V4 attitudes towards Taiwan, we dug deeper into societal divisions based on socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, and education, as well as divisions according to the political preferences of the respondents.

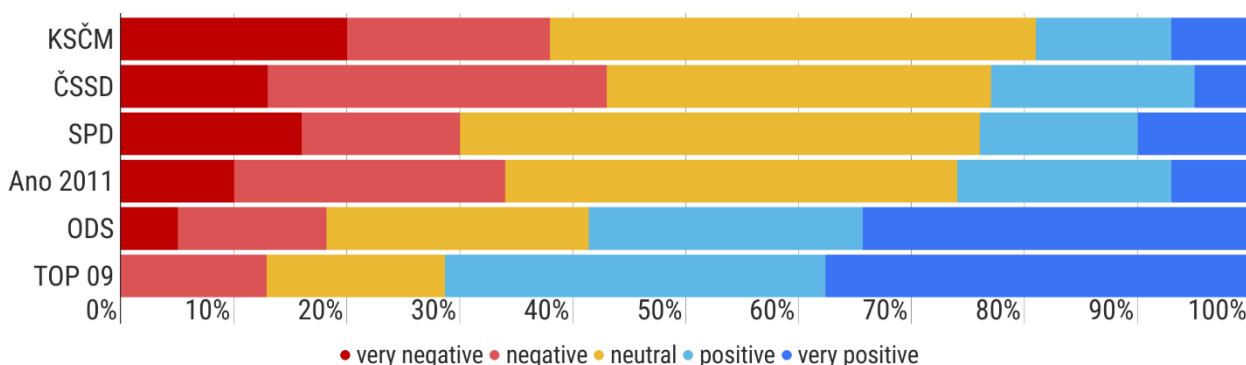
In **Czechia**, men are slightly more positive towards Taiwan than women, as the average sentiment on a 0-100 scale (with 0 most negative, 100 most positive, and 50 neutral) was 54 for men and 49 for women. There are no significant differences between age groups or among people practicing various religions. However, there are substantial differences depending on education level, with the more educated respondents expressing much more positive sentiments (61) towards Taiwan than the less educated ones (48). Similar but less pronounced differences exist between urban and rural habitants, with urban respondents being somewhat more positive (55) towards Taiwan than their rural counterparts (50). Interestingly, respondents from Prague and Hradec Kralove were more positive towards Taiwan than respondents from other regions, with average sentiments of 59 and 56, respectively. Those more satisfied with their personal economic situation tended to be more positive towards Taiwan than those less satisfied. There is a positive correlation between favorable attitudes towards Taiwan and the level of political interest shown by the respondents.

These findings confirm the previous suggestion regarding a lack of knowledge about Taiwan among the general population, suggesting that an awareness of Taiwan, stemming from higher education and interest in politics, leads to more favorable perceptions towards the country. These differences could be used in designing an effective public diplomacy strategy to increase Taiwan's image in Czechia.

Unsurprisingly, attitudes towards President Miloš Zeman are a significant driving force of attitudes towards Taiwan. Those who did not vote for Zeman in the second round of the 2018 presidential election are more positive towards Taiwan than the Zeman voters. Moreover, respondents who were generally unsatisfied with President Zeman and his approach to China were substantially more positive towards Taiwan. Regarding preferences for political parties, the voters of the Communist Party were the most negative towards Taiwan (43), while voters of TOP09 and ODS were the most positive (69 and 65, respectively).

These findings suggest that Taiwan is a political issue in Czechia, as political parties take positions vis-a-vis Taiwan driven by their respective ideology and strategic outlook. This finding also aligns with previous studies suggesting that China is a politicized topic in Czechia and that Czech society is polarized in its Taiwan approach.⁸

Figure 9: Perceptions of Taiwan in Czechia by voting preferences (% of respondents)

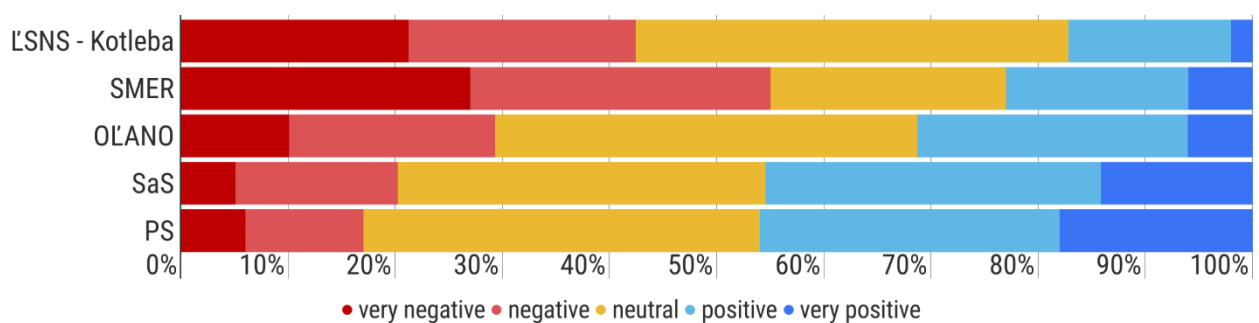


In **Slovakia**, similarly to Czechia, male respondents were found to be somewhat more favorable toward Taiwan, with an average sentiment of 49, compared to females, who gave an average response of 43. Also, while no meaningful difference in opinion was found between respondents holding primary and secondary levels of education (each displayed an average response of 44), college-educated individuals were found to be more favorable, with an average response score of 52. Young respondents below the age of 30 and older ones above the age of 50 were substantially more favorable toward Taiwan (with average response scores of 46-51) compared to those aged between 30 and 50, who held average response scores of 42-44. As was the case in Czechia, differences were found between urban and rural respondents, with the former somewhat more positive in their assessments of Taiwan (50) than the latter (43). Respondents from the Bratislava region were more positive in their feelings towards Taiwan (51) than those from other regions (among which the maximum regional mean was 46). Interestingly, unlike in the other V4 countries, few differences could be discerned based on respondents' level of economic satisfaction.

Respondents expressing a higher level of political interest were much more likely to express favorable views of Taiwan. This, combined with the findings on variables such as education, suggests that knowledge of Taiwan is probably tied to more positive views.

Some differences could also be found based on domestic partisan divisions, although not as large as in the case of the Czech Republic. Respondents expressing a desire to vote for Progressive Slovakia (PS) or Sloboda a Solidarita (SaS) held higher degrees of favorability toward Taiwan, with 58 and 56, respectively. In contrast, those affiliated with SMER held the lowest, falling below the 40-point mark.

Figure 10: Perceptions of Taiwan in Slovakia by voting preferences (% of respondents)

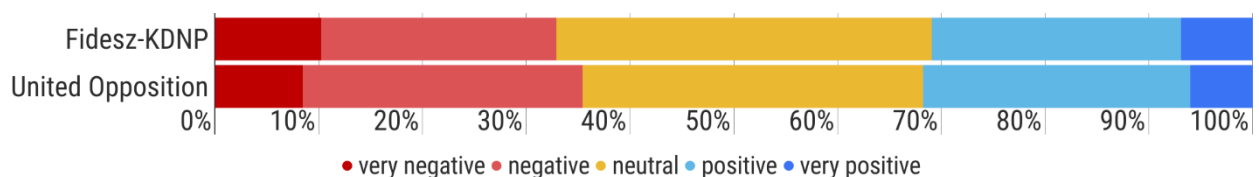


In **Hungary**, male respondents were also found to be somewhat more favorable toward Taiwan, with an average sentiment of 51, compared to females, who provided an average response of 43. Support for Taiwan was also strongly correlated with education levels. Respondents with only a primary education expressed a 41-unit average of support, while those with a secondary level expressed a 47-unit average of support. College-educated respondents provided an average perception of 55. No significant divisions in favorability toward Taiwan were found based on age. Likely tied to the former observation on education, Hungarians living in rural regions were significantly less favorable of Taiwan (with an average response score of 46) relative to those from urban areas (who provided an average response score of 49). Respondents from the Budapest and Vas regions were more positive in their feelings towards Taiwan (51) than those from other regions, with Esztergom and Veszprem regions registering the lowest approval rates with 42 and 43, respectively. Finally, respondents expressing a higher degree of satisfaction with their economic situation were far more likely to express more favorable views of Taiwan, as were those expressing a higher degree of political interest. As in other V4 countries, exposure to information about Taiwan is likely tied to more favorable perceptions.

Interestingly, no considerable differences in opinions regarding Taiwan could be discerned in Hungary in line with domestic political divisions. Supporters of the

ruling Fidesz and those who desire to vote for opposition parties broadly expressed the same sentiment toward Taiwan. Furthermore, few significant differences could be found when dividing the United Opposition into its individual parties. This can perhaps be seen as surprising given the largely pro-PRC foreign policy espoused by Fidesz' Viktor Orban and the more Western-aligned stances of the opposition parties.

Figure 11: Perceptions of Taiwan in Hungary by voting preferences (% of respondents)



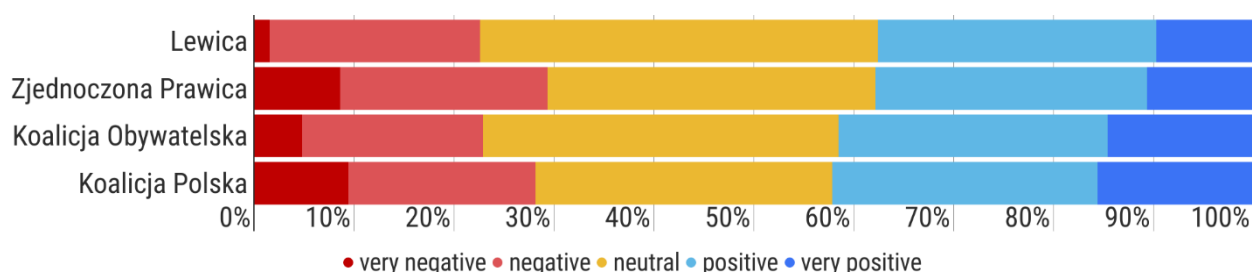
In **Poland**, male respondents held more positive perceptions of Taiwan, with an average sentiment of 56, compared to women, who provided an average response of 50. In terms of education, each additional level gained was tied to additional favorability toward Taiwan. College-educated respondents provided an average response score of 56 compared to the average of 46 among those possessing only primary education. Older respondents were also generally more favorable toward Taiwan. As in all other V4 countries, differences in Taiwan's favorability could be found based on the regional setting. Indeed, respondents from urban areas were more favorable, with an average score of 56, compared to the mean of 50 among respondents from rural areas. Poland represents the only V4 country in which respondents from the capital region were not the most favorable toward Taiwan, with several other regions, such as Zachodniopomorskie and Pomorskie exhibiting higher levels of approval.

Respondents expressing a higher level of political interest were much more likely to have favorable views of Taiwan, with those expressing the highest possible level on the former measure providing an average Taiwan-favorability score of 63. Similarly, those expressing high degrees of satisfaction with their personal economic well-being were more likely to express highly positive favorability toward Taiwan.

Differences in opinion could also be found based on domestic partisan divides. Those expressing desires to vote for Lewica, Konfederacja, or the Obywatelska Coalition expressed the highest degree of favorability toward Taiwan (with average response scores ranging from 55 to 56), while respondents supporting Zjednoczona Prawica or the Polish Coalition expressed somewhat lower average

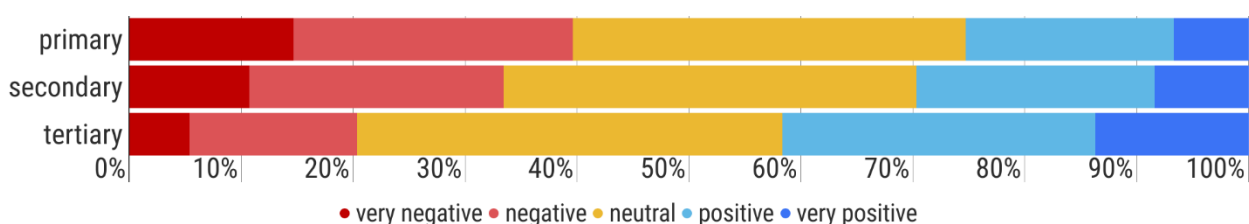
response scores (52-53). The differences were, however, not as large as in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Figure 12: Perceptions of Taiwan in Poland by voting preferences (% of respondents)



Among the different demographic traits examined in this report, education represents the most salient determinant of respondents' attitudes toward Taiwan in V4 countries. Unlike other traits, whose effects differed in each country, education held stable, consistent, and significant effects throughout all national settings. In all four, respondents with higher education levels were significantly more likely to express positive or very positive feelings toward Taiwan. The magnitude of this difference was often much greater than in the case of other traits such as gender, age, or region of residence. This indicates that higher levels of information and political knowledge are likely key to fostering positive views of Taiwan.

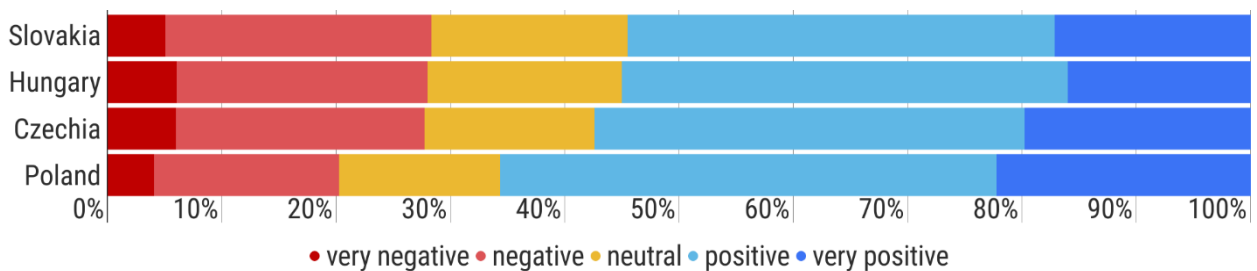
Figure 13: Perceptions of Taiwan in V4 Countries by education level (% of respondents)



Taiwanese attitudes towards the Visegrad countries

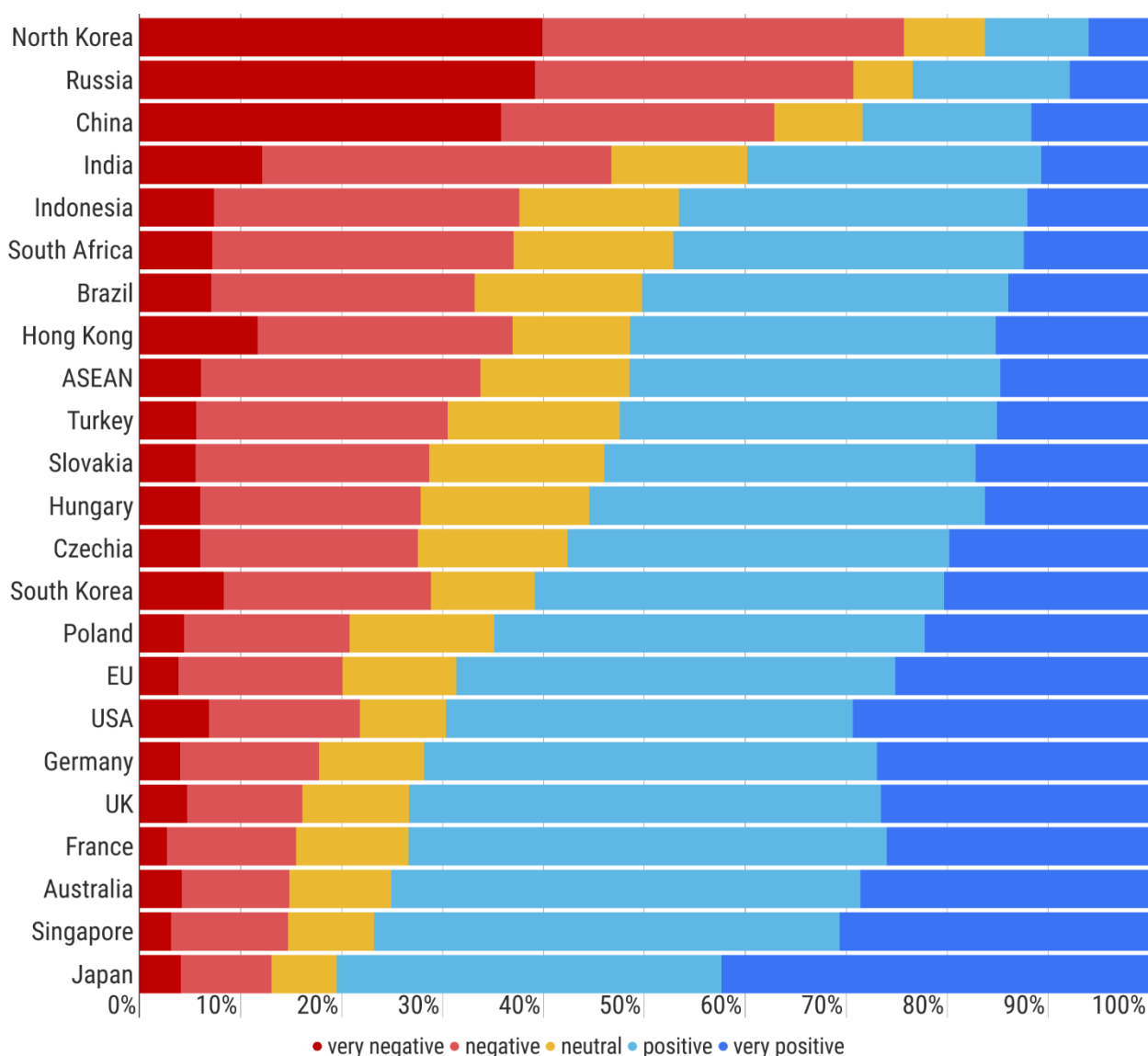
Taiwanese respondents were generally positive towards all four Visegrad countries. They expressed average perception scores of 59 toward Czechia, 58 toward Slovakia and Hungary, and 62 toward Poland. For each of the four countries, the share of respondents expressing positive or very positive views ranged from 54 to 65%, while the corresponding share of negative or very negative sentiments ranged from 20 to 28%.

Figure 14: Perceptions of the V4 countries in Taiwan (% of respondents)



These results put the V4 countries somewhat below Western European democracies and countries like Japan, Australia, and the US but above most other countries around the world. This may be natural, given the limited size, capacity, and international influence of the V4 countries. In fact, the current level of popularity may be perceived as a success related to the relatively high-profile relations between the V4 countries and Taiwan in recent years. However, the impact of these should not be exaggerated, as shown by the fact that Poland has overtaken Czechia (which has been the most high-profile supported of Taiwan recently, including the historic visit by Senate President Vystrčil in 2020), while Hungary (with a much colder approach to Taiwan) scored at about the same level as Slovakia and Czechia.⁹

Figure 15: Perceptions of various countries in Taiwan (% of respondents)

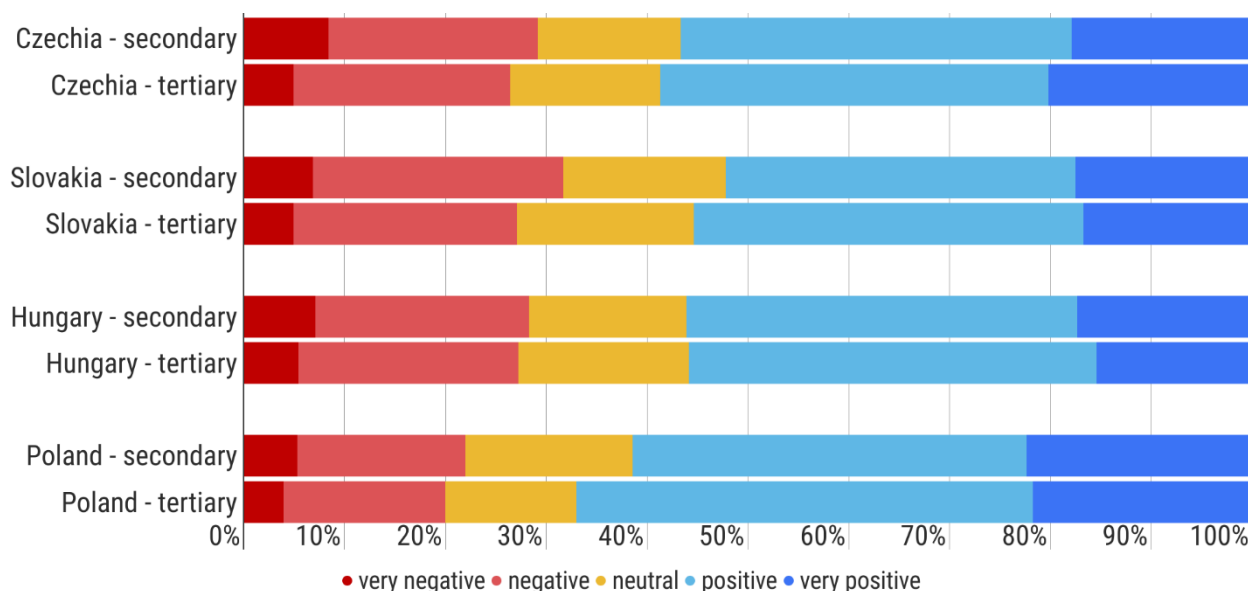


Few differences could be discerned based on gender and age. Those with a college education expressed a marginally higher degree of support toward Czechia, Slovakia, and Poland. However, no such effect could be found in the case of attitudes toward Hungary. This is an interesting finding as it may reflect the awareness and impact of the current positive relations between these two countries and Taiwan, including numerous high-level visits, which are not present in its relations with Hungary.

In the case of all V4 countries, Taiwanese living in more urbanized areas expressed slightly higher degrees of average favorability (ranging from 58 to 63) than those living in rural zones, which provided average scores ranging from 56

to 59. However, it is interesting to note that the urban-rural divide was much smaller than in the surveys carried out in the V4 counterparts.

**Figure 16: Perceptions of the V4 countries in Taiwan by education level
(% of respondents)**

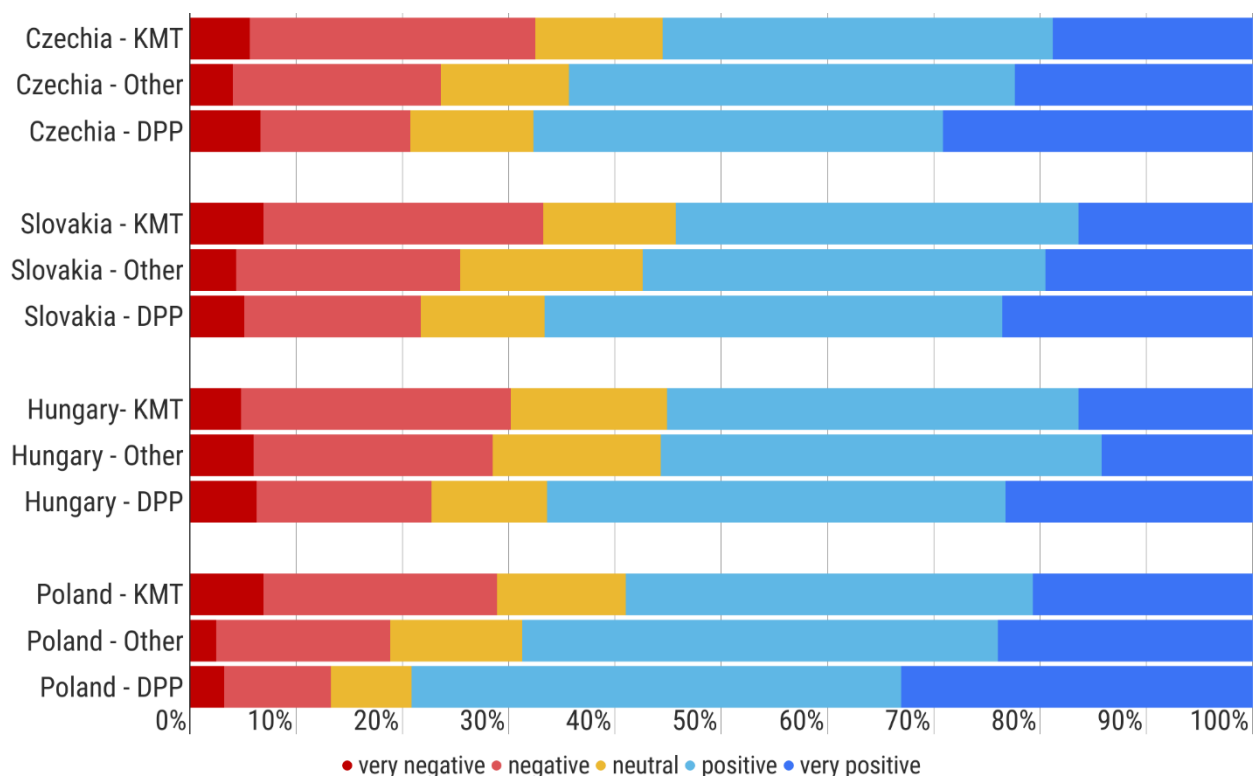


Respondents expressing a higher level of political interest were much more likely to express favorable views of all V4 countries. This is perhaps unsurprising given the relatively small geopolitical weight of these countries and the resulting lack of information about them in some segments of the population. Strikingly, those self-identifying as possessing the highest possible levels of political interest expressed up to a 71-point average approval of the V4 countries. It may be, however, interesting to note that this mechanism also applies to Hungary, which has been regularly criticized in recent years for deteriorating standards of democracy at home, as well as being too cozy with Russia and China in its foreign policy.

Similarly, Taiwanese respondents expressing high degrees of satisfaction with their personal economic situation were also more likely to express high favorability toward the V4 countries. As was the case in the V4 countries, these findings suggest that better knowledge and information regarding the V4 countries is likely to lead to a higher appraisal of them among the Taiwanese public.

Differences in perception of the V4 also exist based on electoral preferences among the Taiwanese public. Those expressing a desire to vote for the DPP held higher average favorability towards each of the four countries (with average response scores ranging from 62 to 69) relative to those wishing to vote for the KMT or Other parties (with average response scores between 57 and 63).

Figure 17: Perceptions of the V4 countries in Taiwan by political party preference (% of respondents)



Endnotes

- ¹ 'Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges,' was a research project funded by the European Regional Development Fund and run by Palacký University Olomouc in 2018-2022 (see sinofon.cz/surveys). The survey in Taiwan was part of a wider survey of 15 Indo-Pacific countries (2022) and the surveys in the V4 countries were part of a wider survey of 13 European countries (2020).
- ² The data collection was conducted online and was coordinated by STEM/MARK, in cooperation with Cint. The questionnaire consisted of more than 300 data points, including a few open questions. The questions asked about various aspects of attitudes towards foreign countries, policy preferences, views about social and human rights issues, and basic demographics.
- ³ Turcsányi, R. Q., K. Kironska, A. Gerstl, M. Arnez, J. Čeněk, J. Chen, R. Chen, A. Chubb, P. Gries, T. Wang, 2022, "Sinophone Borderlands Indo-Pacific Survey", Palacký University Olomouc, 2022.
- ⁴ The data collection was conducted online and was coordinated by NMS, in cooperation with Cint. The questionnaire consisted of more than 300 data points, including a few open questions. The questions asked about various aspects of attitudes towards foreign countries, policy preferences, views about social and human rights issues, and basic demographics.
- ⁵ 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." Palacký University Olomouc.
- ⁶ The exact wording of the question is as follows: "How positively or negatively do you feel about Taiwan on the scale of 0 to 100, where 0 represents cold, negative feelings, 50 represents neutral, and 100 represents warm, positive feelings?"
- ⁷ Something similar also applies to how South Korea is perceived, see Richard Q. Turcsányi, Esther E. Song, 2022, South Koreans Have the World's Most Negative Views of China. Why? The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/south-koreans-have-the-worlds-most-negative-views-of-china-why/>.
- ⁸ Martin Šebeňa & Richard Q. Turcsányi, "Divided National Identity and COVID-19: How China Has Become a Symbol of Major Political Cleavage in the Czech Republic", China Review 21, no.2 (2021): 35-64.
- ⁹ More information on EU-Taiwan ties and specific events representing significant developments in them can be found on CEIAS' EU-Taiwan tracker. See <https://eutwtracker.ceias.eu/tracker>.

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The main goal of CEIAS is to spread knowledge about Asia among scholars and experts in Central Europe and beyond, while also informing the public about Central European activities in Asia.

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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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Design: James Locovozzi, Matej Šimalčík

Cite as: Richard Q. Turcsányi, Benjamin Toettoe, James Locovozzi, Kristína Kironská. Public attitudes in Taiwan-V4 relations: Solid basis, space for improvement: CEIAS, February 2023.

Published by:

Central European Institute of Asian Studies
Murgašova 2, 811 04 Bratislava, Slovakia
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The survey data are the result of the European Regional Development Fund project "Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges," CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000791.

Preparation of this report was supported by a grant from Taipei Representative Office in Bratislava.

ISBN 978-80–8239-015-8



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