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Fear of China’s Economic Power: Media and Party Affiliation on Public Opinion

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Introduction to Research

- This study examines how factors including news media consumption, political ideology, partisanship, and attitudes towards race and immigration affect attitudes towards China’s economy overtaking the United States
- American in-group bias against China has steadily increased over the past two decades with sinophobia hitting an all-time high during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Public opinion is a large factor in international policy decisions, and American biases against the Chinese may adversely affect both the American and Chinese economies. In a world where mainstream media has a large influence over American population, it is vital to examine how news sources influence attitudes toward foreign policy and how media affects those with diverse political beliefs.
- As Chinese-American trade is a vital part of international economic growth, it is important to examine how media and political movements affect public attitudes.

News Consumption, Ideology, and Partisanship

- Media scholars have found that news consumption directly influences people’s political opinions and may lead to political action. Bi, Lu, Ha, and Chen have found that consuming social media news about the US-China trade war was correlated with more favorable attitudes toward the Chinese. However, the correlation between social media and US public opinion on Chinese economic power has not been thoroughly studied.
- Research has shown that partisan identity affects foreign policy beliefs. Although a study by Gries and Crowson have found that political ideology impacts attitudes towards China more than party identification, the majority of pre-existing studies show a correlation between Republicans and negative attitudes towards China

Hypotheses

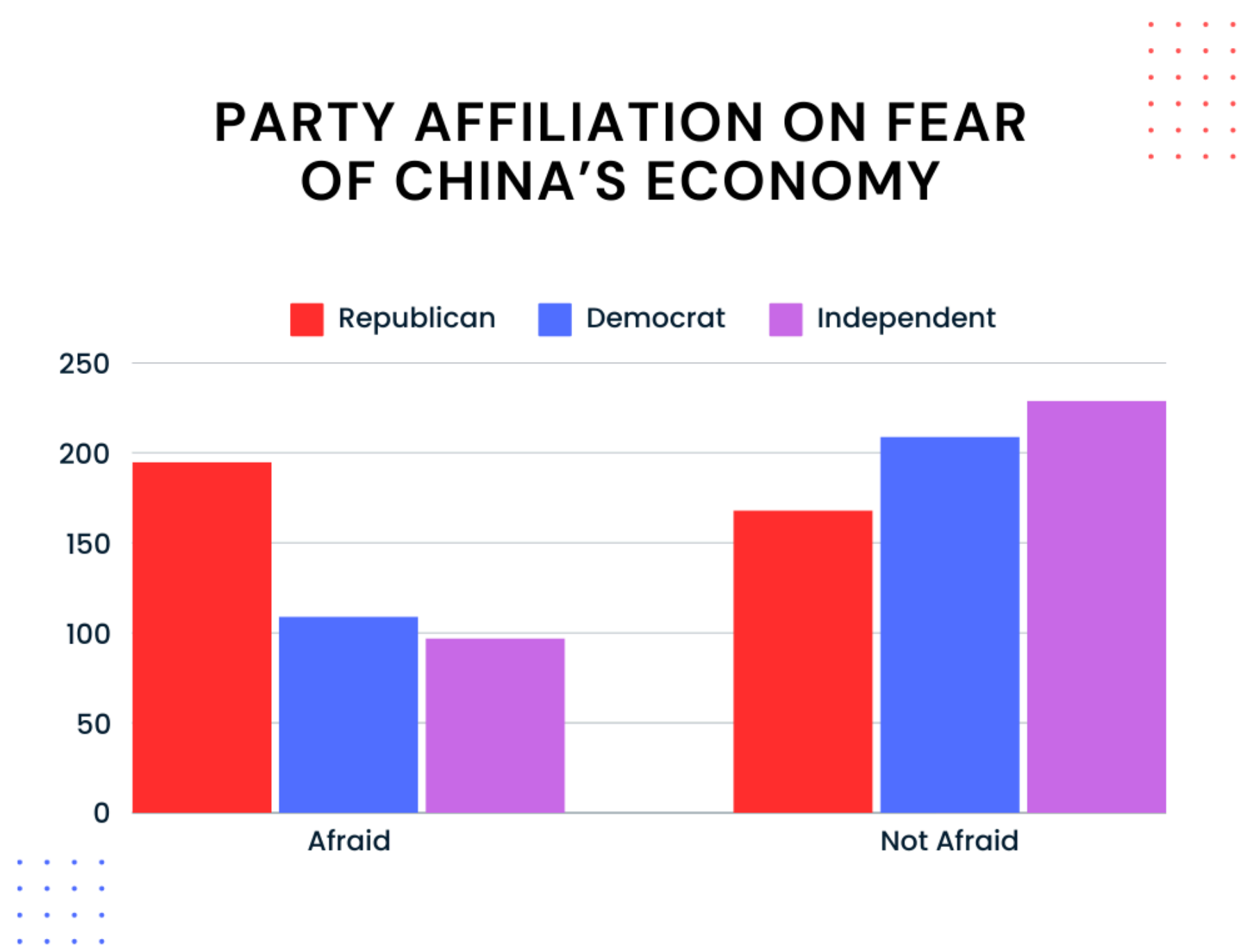
- H 1: Republicans are more likely to fear China’s economy than Independents and Democrats. Similarly, conservatives are more likely to fear China’s economy than moderates and liberals.
- H 2: Those who consume news through social media are more likely to fear China’s economy than those who do not.
- H 3: Republicans who watch Fox News are more likely to fear China’s economy than Republicans who do not watch Fox News.

Data

H 1: Party Affiliation and Political Ideology

Cross Tabulation Results:

- Party Affiliation
 - 53.7% of Republicans, 29.8% of Independents, and 34.3% of Democrats are afraid of China’s economy
- Political Ideology
 - 48.6% of conservatives, 40.3% of moderates, and 25.2% of liberals are afraid of China’s economy



H 2: News Media Consumption

Model	Coefficient (B)	Stand. Coefficient	Significance
Online News Websites	-.057	-.093	.004
National nightly network news	-.006	-.011	.785
Fox News	.199	.318	<.001
CNN	-.047	-.062	.151
MSNBC	.003	.004	.929
Local TV news	.040	.069	.079
Daytime talk show	.069	.091	.007
Political radio show	.030	.045	.154
Social Media	.027	.046	.146

H 3: Fox News

Cross Tabulation Results:

- Republicans:
- 64.2% who watched frequently were afraid
 - 46.0% who watched infrequently were afraid
 - 44.7% who never watched were afraid
- Independents:
- 62.7% who watched frequently were afraid
 - 39.3% who watched infrequently were afraid
 - 16.3% who never watched were afraid
- Democrats:
- 46.2% who watched frequently were afraid
 - 43.5% who watched infrequently were afraid
 - 27.6% who never watched were afraid

Table Interpretation

- The table measures consumption levels of online news websites, national nightly network news, Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, Local TV news, daytime talk shows, Political radio shows, and social media news in reference to the participants’ selected level of fear toward China’s economy overtaking the US
- Online news websites has a significance level of .004. *Those who consumed higher levels of online news tend to be more afraid of China’s economy overtaking the US.*
- Fox News has a significance level of <.001. *Those who consume higher levels of Fox News tend to be more afraid of China’s economy overtaking the US.*
- Daytime talk shows have a significance level of .007. *Those who consume higher levels of daytime talk shows tend to be more afraid of China’s economy overtaking the US.*
- National nightly network news, CNN, MSNBC, local tv news, political radio shows, and social media news were all insignificant.
- Out of the three significant news media sources, Fox News has the greatest impact on fear of China’s economy with a standard B-value of .318.

Findings

H 1: Party Affiliation and Political Ideology

Overall, Republicans are more likely to be afraid of China’s economic power than Democrats and Independents. Conservatives are also more likely to fear China’s economic power than liberals and moderates.

H 2: News Media Consumption

Interestingly, social media was not significantly correlated with fear of China’s economy overtaking the United States. News consumption from online news websites, Fox News, and daytime talk shows show significant impacts on attitudes towards China’s economy, with Fox News having the greatest impact by far.

H 3: Fox News

Those who watch Fox News tend to have greater fear of China’s economic power across all political parties. Significantly more Republicans watch Fox News than Independents and Democrats, but those who do are more likely to be afraid of China than Republicans who do not.

Conclusions

American fear of China has escalated in the past few years, from fears of cybersecurity threats to the US-China trade war. In particular, Americans are afraid of losing economic hegemony. However, the root of these fears may lie in partisan biases, which are only exacerbated by sources like Fox News. Unnecessary fear of China’s economic growth promoted by the media or partisan agendas may dangerously escalate international tensions in a world in which US interests are interlocked with China’s.

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