Trading with China, Is It Really a Security Issue?

Causes of Securitization of Trade Among American Public

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Abstract

Not even ten years ago, the then-US President Barack Obama and Chinese leader Xi Jinping proclaimed a potential start of a "new model of relations between great powers" at the Sunnylands Estate in California, and the pacifying effect of trade seemed ever more convincing. However, the sunny weather rapidly started to change after Donald Trump succeeded as the US President in 2016. Amidst threats and self-accolades, the Trump administration launched a trade 'war' against China. Although there has not been an exchange of gunshots, the US-China relation is far from being 'peaceful', including the trade area. Security terminology such as 'war', 'attack', and 'arms race' has been dominating the discussion around the bilateral economic relation. The general public seems to share this hostility and suspicion towards China.

This study aims to explore this phenomenon more deeply: *When do Americans think of international trade as a national security issue rather than just as an economic issue? Is securitization of trade unique to the US-China trade relation?* We first explore the different potential sources of securitization of trade: elite cues, institutional linkage, decreasing power gap between the US and China, and spillover effect of personal economic security. We then examine whether the securitization of trade is dependent on the trade partner, as well as subjects' foreign policy dispositional characteristics. Our initial results suggest that the power gap cue is the most powerful source of securitization, but just mentioning negative economic aspects of trade can trigger securitization of trade even for a benign ally, such as Canada.

Keywords: trade and security, survey experiment, national security, US and China

Introduction

Not even ten years ago, the then-US President Barack Obama and Chinese leader Xi Jinping proclaimed a potential start of a "new model of relations between great powers" at the Sunnylands Estate in California in 2013, and the pacifying effect of trade seemed ever more convincing.[1] For a long time, China had been pointed as a potential challenger, and therefore a threat, to the US hegemony,[2] but despite warnings of neo-realists, the two great powers seemed to be able to pursue a peaceful coexistence largely based on their mutual trade interdependence. However, the sunny weather rapidly started to change after Donald Trump succeeded as the US President in 2016. Amidst threats and self-accolades, the Trump administration launched a trade 'war' against China.[3] Although there has not been an exchange of gunshots, the US-China relation is far from being 'peaceful', including the trade area. Security terminology such as 'war', 'attack', and 'arms race' has dominated the discussion about the bilateral economic relation, and the general public seems to share this hostility and suspicion towards China.

This study aims to explore this phenomenon more deeply: *When do Americans think of international trade as a national security issue rather than just as an economic issue? Is securitization of trade unique to the US-China trade relation?* In order to answer these questions, we have conducted two experiments. We first explore the different potential sources of securitization of trade: elite cues, institutional linkage, decreasing power gap between the US and China, and spillover effect of personal economic security. In the second experiment, we examine whether the securitization of trade is dependent on the trade partner by looking at

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[1] *See* Richard C. Bush. 2013. "Obama and Xi at Sunnylands: A Good Start". Brookings (June 10), available at https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2013/06/10/obama-and-xi-at-sunnylands-a-good-start/.

[2] *See i.e.* John J. Mearsheimer. 2001. "The Future of the American Pacifier". Foreign Affairs (September/October), 46-61.

[3] *See i.e.* Chad P. Bown and Melina Kolb. 2021 "Trump's Trade War Timeline: an Up-to-Date Guide". Peterson Institute for International Economics (February 8), available at https://www.piie.com/blogs/trade-investment-policy-watch/trump-trade-war-china-date-guide.

whether the subjects respond differently to the same cues but with different trade partners – China and Canada. Furthermore, we test how one's dispositional characteristics such as military assertiveness and attitude towards international cooperation, affect securitization of trade.

The rest of this paper is organized as the following. We first give a brief overview of the previous literature on the linkage between international trade and national security, and point out a discrepancy between the academia and the general public's view on trade's effect on security. We examine factors affecting the public opinion on trade, and present our hypotheses on the sources of trade securitization. Then, we describe our survey experiment research designs. We show our initial findings and conclude with some discussion points for future research.

Linking International Trade and National Security

Disparity Between the Experts and Public

There is a noticeable divergence between the general perception and the academic consensus regarding the relation between trade and security. On the one hand, in the security literature, there seems to be a dominating opinion that international economic interdependence, especially international trade, promotes peace (Gartzke et al. 2001: 394; Polacheck and Xiang, 2010:133). Admittedly, some studies found that trade increases the probability of conflict (Barbieri, 1996), and that the pacifying effect of trade disappears when other factors are taken into consideration (Keshk, Pollins, and Reuveny, 2004; Kim and Rousseau, 2005). Nevertheless, follow-up studies refuted them (Oneal and Russett, 1999; Xiang, Xu, and Keteku, 2007; Hegre, Oneal, and Russett, 2010), and at the moment, the academic consensus seems to agree on the pacifying effects of trade.

On the other hand, the general public seems to be more skeptical of the pacifying effects of trade. In particular, when it comes to the US-China bilateral trade relationship, the public's skepticism is intensified.

For example, according to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2020, the general public are much more concerned about the rising power and influence of China, compared to the international relations scholars are.[4] While the World Trade Organization (WTO) boasts its contribution to peace as one of the ten benefits of its global trading system,[5] the recent years of globalization backlash have shown that the international economic regime can be as easily tainted with threats and use of unilateral 'attacks.'

Public Opinion about Trade Policy

We focus on four potential sources for the securitization of trade. First, the public can be influenced by the political elites who link trade and security for their electoral benefits. Some politicians have incentives to link the two issue areas. Some may wish to stand out as strong, hawkish nationalists by promoting stricter stance against China. Other may be interested in having higher trade restrictions under the pretext of national security to secure the local economy of their electorates. Second, in addition to mere words from the politicians, the American public can see that in the US domestic institutions, there is more movement linking trade and security. The epitome of this is the increased use of 'national security exception' to impose tariffs against Chinese imports, also known as the Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962. Third, personal economic hardship caused by an increased import penetration from China may lead people into thinking that China is a national security threat. In other words, people may be projecting their personal wellbeing to the national security. Lastly, the general public may be alarmed by the decreasing power gap between the US and China, and start to perceive trading with China as a threat.

Conventional wisdom dictates that the general public lacks information to form an informed opinion about

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[4] Jacob Poushter and Moira Fagan. 2020. ""Foreign policy experts in the U.S. have much different views about threats to the country than the general public"". Pew Research Center (October 23), available at https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/23/foreign-policy-experts-in-the-u-s-have-much-different-views-about-threats-to-the-country-than-the-general-public/.

[5] WTO, "9. The WTO Can Contribute to Peace and Stability", available at https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/10thi_e/10thi09_e.htm.

foreign policy issues. Most people do not have enough time and resources to keep up with all the relevant information. In this context, it is thought that people use available information and prior political knowledge to assess a given situation (Nincic, 1992; Boudreau and Lupia, 2011). For example, elite cues work as an important source of information, around which the public form their opinion (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998). Most people have heard the then-President Donald Trump frequently describing the growing trade deficit with China as a security threat to the US, as well as launching a trade 'war' with China.[6]

> Hypothesis A1 (elite cues):
>
> The American public will perceive an increase in trade with China as more of a security threat when they hear the political elites referring to trading with China as a security threat.

In addition to the political rhetoric, the public may require more substantive evidence, such as domestic court cases that show the linkage between trade and security or substantive institutional changes. Mere political rhetoric may not be enough to fully persuade the public. John G. Bullock (2011) finds some evidence that people do not blindly follow elite cues: he finds that when the public is given adequate information, they are able to reassess their evaluation of a policy. In this context, it should be noted that Trump's securitization of trade did not end at political rhetoric and unilateral tariff attacks. When he declared a set of new tariffs on steel and aluminum on March 8, 2018, he explicitly linked trade and security, invoking the national security exceptions pursuant to Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962.[7] Under the Section 232, the president has the authority to restrict imports for the purpose of protecting 'national security', after an investigation by the Department of Commerce (DoC) including consultations with the Secretary of Defense.[8] Such a national security exception is important, because it explicitly ties

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[6] *See i.e.* Chad P. Bown and Melina Kolb. 2021 "Trump's Trade War Timeline: an Up-to-Date Guide". Peterson Institute for International Economics (February 8), available at https://www.piie.com/blogs/trade-investment-policy-watch/trump-trade-war-china-date-guide.

[7] Chad P. Bown. 2018. "Trump's Steel and Aluminum Tariffs: How WTO Retaliation Typically Works". Peterson Institute for International Economics (March 5), available at https://www.piie.com/blogs/trade-and-investment-policy-watch/trumps-steel-and-aluminum-tariffs-how-wto-retaliation

[8] For more on Section 232 Investigations, *see* Rachel F. Fefer, Keigh E. Hammond, Vivian C. Jones, Brandon J. Murrill, Michaela D. Platzer and Brock R. Williams. 2020. "Section 232 Investigations: Overview and Issues for

international trade and national security together.[9] Even when there is a weak initial substantive link between trade and security threat, if the general public sees policy changes that connect the two issues together, it is reasonable to expect the public to be more inclined to think that trade dependence is a security threat. National security exception clause, in particular, can lead people to think that more trade could put the national security at risk. Therefore, institutional and policy cues can also be an important source of trade securitization.

> Hypothesis A2 (policy levers):
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> The American public will perceive an increase in trade with China as more of a security threat when there is a change in domestic policy reflecting trade-security linkage (*i.e.* tariffs under national security exceptions)

Meanwhile, the public's opinion can also be affected by their personal economic situation. Benjamin O. Fordham and Katja B. Kleinberg (2011) claim that people who are negatively affected by trade with China are more likely to see China as a threat and support hostile policies against China. In other words, people generalize their personal economic experience and become skeptical about trade dependence on China insofar as they see trade as a security issue.

Congress". Congressional Research Service R45249. Available at https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45249.pdf; Rachel F. Fefer. 2020. "Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962". Congressional Research Service. Available at https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/IF10667.pdf; "Special Topic: Section 232 and 301 Trade Actions in 2018". United States International Trade Commission. Available at https://www.usitc.gov/research_and_analysis/trade_shifts_2018/special_topic.htm; Simon Lester and Huan Zhu. 2019. "Closing Pandora's Box: The Growing Abuse of the National Security Rationale for Restricting Trade". CATO Institute Policy Analysis No. 874. Available at https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/closing-pandoras-box-growing-abuse-national-security-rationale-restricting-trade.

[9] National security exceptions can be found in international economic agreements as well. For instance, the GATT (Article XXI), the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) (Article XIV bis), and the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement), (Article 73) each includes a separate national security exception clause. The Agreement on Trade Related Investment Measures (TRIMS Agreement) and the Agreement on Trade Facilitation, contains, or explicitly refers to a national security exception in Article 3 and Article 24.7, respectively. Other regional and bilateral preferential trade agreements also include a national security exception. *See* Peter Van den Bossche and Sarah Akpofure. 2019. "The Use and Abuse of the National Security Exception under Article XXI(b)(iii) of the GATT 1994". World Trade Institute Working Paper No. 03/2020. Available at https://www.wti.org/media/filer_public/50/57/5057fb22-f949-4920-8bd1-e8ad352d22b2/wti_working_paper_03_2020.pdf.

Hypothesis A3 (individual economic reasoning):

The American public will perceive an increase in trade with China as more of a security threat
when they expect personal economic loss from trading with China.

While confounding one's economic wellbeing and one's national security can be seen as a 'irrational'
thinking, that people cannot differentiate the difference between their economic well-being and national
security, linking the economy and national security is not just a cognitive error. Neorealists have long
argued for the importance of fungibility of power, which makes all issues (especially economic power)
related to national security. Those with a neorealist's point of view may think that what matters is the
relative benefit of international trade. According to a study published by Carnegie Endowment for
International Peace in 2013, not only is the trust level between the US and China very low, but also a
majority of the American public (59%) was more concerned about China's economic strength than its
military strength (28%).[10] Thus, even the most 'rational' audience has reasons to link trade and national
security. It is possible that the general public will think of international trade as a more of a security issue
if they see a decreasing power gap between their own country and the trade partner.

Hypothesis A4 (power gap):

The American public will perceive an increase in trade with China as more of a security threat
when they hear that the power gap between the US and China is decreasing.

Another possibility is that the securitization of trade is tied to the trade partner. Previous studies have found
that the support for trade is dependent on the trade partner (*e.g.* Naomi, 2020). Diana C. Mutz and Eunji
Kim (2017) find that in-group favoritism affects trade preferences. Moreover, one would be naturally more
concerned about the relative gains of a rival state than an ally state. The rivalry between the US and China
is a well-known fact. Negative views towards China have been growing over the recent years among the
developed countries, including the US, and some, such as the EU, have started to see China as the leading

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[10] Miachael D. Swaine, Rachel Esplin Odell, Luo Yuan, and Liu Xiandong. 2013. "US-China Security Perceptions
Survey: Findings and Implications." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (December 12), available at
https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/12/12/u.s.-china-security-perceptions-survey-findings-and-implications-pub-
53820.

economic power.[11] The combination of decreasing power gap and mistrust in Chinese government makes the Americans wary of China more than other countries. In another survey by Gallup in 2022 February, 57% of American respondents think of the economic power of China as a critical threat to the interests of the US.[12] Trade with China, in particular, has received spotlight about sensitive technology transfer and digital security issues in the US.[13] Therefore, we have reasons to believe that that securitization of trade occurs specifically to the US-China relations.

Hypothesis B (partner effect):
The American public will perceive trade with China, as more of a security threat than trade with an ally (*e.g.* Canada).

One's foreign policy dispositions can also affect one's perception of threat related to trade. Since trade policy is an important subset of foreign policy (*e.g.* Cooper, 1973), it is reasonable to expect one's foreign policy dispositions are related to one's attitude towards international trade. Previous literature shows that public's foreign policy attitudes can be represented by a few dimensions: cooperative internationalism, militant assertiveness, and isolationism (Wittkopf, 1986; Holsti and Rosenau, 1988; Rathbun et al., 2016). Those who score high on cooperative internationalism value and support international institutions, as well as multilateralism. On the contrary, those who score high on militant assertiveness incline towards the use of military, and often unilateral, options. Isolationism are a little different from the other two dimensions, as it represents fundamentally a disengagement attitude when it comes to the world affairs. While a number of studies find that one's foreign policy dispositions are closely related to predispositions such as personal values (Rathbun, Ketzer, Reifler, Goren and Scotto, 2016), moral values (Kertzer, Powers, Rathbun, and

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[11] *E.g.* Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Huang. 2020. "Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries." Pew Research Center (October 6), available at https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/.

[12] Gallup. "In Depth: Topics A to Z - China", available at https://news.gallup.com/poll/1627/china.aspx.

[13] *See* Ryan Hass. 2021. "The "New Normal" in US-China Relations: Hardening Competition and Deep Interdependence." Brookings (August 12), available at https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/08/12/the-new-normal-in-us-china-relations-hardening-competition-and-deep-interdependence/.

Iyer, 2014), personality traits (Gravelle, Reifler and Scotto, 2020), and nationalism (Herrmann, Isernia, and Segatti, 2009), in this project, we focus on the foreign policy dispositions rather than the underlying factors. Given that militant assertiveness emphasizes military options, we expect those who score high on the militant assertiveness will show greater tendencies of trade securitization than those who score high on cooperative internationalism.

> Hypothesis C (foreign policy disposition)
>
> Those who score high on military assertiveness will be more likely to see trade as a national security issue than those who score high on cooperative internationalism.

Research Design

In order to test our theory, we conducted two survey experiments. Both experiments took place online with student samples from University of California (UC) – Davis, using Qualtrics. Students were given extra credit for their participation, but no monetary compensation was given. They were also informed that they did not have to finish the survey in order to receive the extra credit. Those who wanted could take the survey online at any time during the given period, and both experiments took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Each subject had to answer some pre-treatment questions including basic demographic questions, read one or two treatment vignettes framed as an online news article (depending on their treatment groups), and answer post-treatment questions on issues such as their threat perceptions and policy preferences. Although the news articles were fabricated by the researchers, they were presented with an Associated Press header in order to enhance credibility. The respondents were debriefed at the end of the experiment.

Experiment 1 – Sources of Securitization

The first experiment explored the four potential sources for the securitization of trade, and therefore, we had four different groups: (1) political elites, (2) policy changes, (3) power gap between the US and China, and (4) individual economic reasoning. All the subjects were given a short introductory paragraph about

international trade. For those in the economic reasoning group, the article talked about the potential negative effects of increased trade with China. The elite cue passage talked about a bipartisan group of Congresspeople calling warning the negative impacts of increased trade with China. The policy lever group read about the US DOC launching an investigation for a national security exception. For those in the *power gap* group, the article talked about the decreasing power gap between the US and China's. Besides the specific points, the four articles were similar in length, tone, and topic.

Before reading the passage, in addition to general demographics questions including the party and ideology identities, the subjects were asked to rate their feelings (out of 1, the coldest, to 100, the warmest) towards the following foreign entities: the European Union, Japan, Mexico, Canada, and China. In the post-treatment phase, the subjects were asked to answer a series of questions on topics including their threat perception of foreign countries, foreign policy preferences with respect to China, and political knowledge.

Experiment 2 – Pre-disposition and Partner Effect on Securitization

The second experiment had a similar structure as the first experiment, but there were some differences. We expanded our set of pretreatment questions to include questions on foreign policy dispositions, xenophobia, and nationalism.[14] Because we use multiple questions to measure a dispositional characteristic, we create a composite measure and re-scale it to a 5-point scale to match other measures in our analysis. After the pretreatment questions, all the subjects were given a short introductory paragraph about the international trade, and with the exception of the control group, the subjects received an additional text according to their treatment group.

In the second experiment, we aimed to examine whether the securitization of trade is unique to the US and

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[14] We based our dispositional characteristic questions from previous studies: Mutz, Diana, Edward D. Mansfield, and Eunji Kim. 2021. "The Racialization of International Trade." *Political Psychology* 42 (4): 555–73; *and* Rathbun, Brian C., Joshua D. Kertzer, Jason Reifler, Paul Goren, and Thomas J. Scotto. 2016. "Taking Foreign Policy Personally: Personal Values and Foreign Policy Beliefs" *International Studies Quarterly* 60 (1): 124–37. See Appendix for the actual wordings of the questions that we used.

China's trade relation, in addition to the different sources of securitization. In order to avoid having too many treatment groups, we narrow down our focus on the sources of securitization to explicit national security cues and economic reasoning. In other words, instead of testing for specific sources of securitization, we tested for whether explicit mention of national security is necessary to trigger securitization. Thus, we had a half of the treatment group read a fabricated article explicitly mentioning national security, and the other half another fabricated article on the economic aspects of trade. We then divided the two groups in half again, so that a half of the explicit national security group and a half of the economic reasoning group read about trade with China. The rest of the subject pool's texts were about trade with Canada. Thus, there were four treatment groups (*economic reasoning – China, national security – China, economic reasoning – Canada,* and *national security – Canada*) and one control group.

As in the first experiment, after reading the text, the subjects were asked post-treatment questions on their attitudes towards China and/or Canada and related policy preferences. We also included optional open-ended questions on what comes to mind when they hear China or Canada. Meanwhile, to avoid making our survey overly long and complicated, in exchange of including more pre-treatment questions, we cut down the number of post-treatment questions on policy preferences.

Results

Experiment 1

The first experiment was conducted from March 7th to March 16th, 2022. A total of 966 UC Davis undergraduate students took the online survey. Eliminating those who did not finish the survey, did not give consent, gave duplicate responses, or failed the attention checks left us with 689 responses. We randomly assigned the subject to four treatment groups: economic reasoning (164 respondents), elite cue (178 respondents), policy lever (163 respondents), and power gap (184 respondents). One caveat is that our sample was not representative of the American population. 417 respondents were female, 247 were male,

25 responded others. While 637 respondents (92.45%) were Americans, there were 16 Chinese respondents. (Eliminating the non-US citizens do not change our results significantly.) More importantly, about 82.7% of the respondents identify as Democrats, compared to 10.2% Republicans, and 7.11% as true independents. Similarly, in terms of ideology, approximately 78.8% of the respondents identified themselves as liberals, while 10.3% identified as conservative.

In order to minimize framing effects by our questions on policy preference, we included four positive policies (*ex.* "increase military cooperation with China") and four related negative policies (*ex.* "militarily contain China"). Our results show a strong positive correlation among the group of policies, as we expected. However, the feelings thermometer measure, which was taken before the treatment, shows a stronger correlation with positive policy supports than the threat perception measure, which was taken after the treatment. For example, the correlation coefficient between the support for increasing military cooperation with China and the feelings thermometer score is 0.32, while for the threat perception score, the correlation coefficient is only 0.06.

Other notable findings are as the following. First, there is a statistically significant difference between the Republicans and Democrats: Those who identified as a Republican perceived China as more of a threat than those who identified as a Democrat (t = 2.293, p-value = 0.024). Second, our results show that those who received the power treatment perceived China as more of a threat than those in other groups (t = -1.897, p-value = 0.059). For instance, those who received the economic reasoning treatment seemed to perceive China as less of a threat than those who received the power gap treatment. On average, the economic reasoning group scored 3.610 out of 5-point scale, while the power gap group scored 3.793. However, the difference is fairly small in both magnitude (-0.183) and variance (t = -1.56, p-value = 0.119). The difference between the elite cue group and the power gap group is slightly bigger (the power gap's score was higher by approximately 0.203), with a stronger statistical significance (t = -1.883, p-value = 0.060). Meanwhile, the difference between the elite cue and economic reasoning cue does not appear to be

statistically significant (t = -0.171, p-value = 0.863), nor that between elite cue and policy cue (t = -0.731, p-value = 0.465) and economic reasoning cue and policy cue (t = -0.503, p-value = 0.615). In other words, the power gap treatment seems to have the strongest effect of securitization, and the other treatments do not appear to be statistically different from one another, which is in support of our Hypothesis A1 (*see* **Table 1**).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (Experiment 1)

	threat perception of China	trade	military cooperation	increase diplomacy	cultural exchange	military containment	protectionism	reduce diplomacy	immigration restriction
Economic reasoning	3.610	2.744	2.701	3.744	3.713	2.402	2.732	1.915	1.768
	(1.127)	(0.995)	(1.157)	(1.094)	(1.161)	(1.123)	(1.103)	(1.012)	(1.149)
Elite cue	3.590	2.787	2.612	3.775	3.871	2.421	3.039	2.017	1.522
	(1)	(0.932)	(1.074)	(1.102)	(1.052)	(1.082)	(1.038)	(1.044)	(0.878)
Policy	3.669	2.798	2.767	3.883	3.933	2.521	2.951	1.933	1.626
	(0.988)	(1.001)	(1.142)	(0.965)	(1.019)	(1.188)	(1.053)	(0.930)	(0.924)
Power gap	3.793	2.717	2.804	3.772	3.761	2.266	2.81	1.848	1.495
	(1.056)	(1.038)	(1.123)	(1.082)	(1.018)	(1.111)	(1.087)	(0.952)	(0.782)

*Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Third, we see an unexpected discrepancy between perceiving China as a threat and support for (what are conventionally thought as) corresponding policy responses. For example, those with the power treatment seemed to perceive China as more of a threat, and yet, they were also opposed to containing China, restricting immigration from China, or reducing diplomatic relations with China. Meanwhile, they seemed to favor increasing military cooperation with China. It is unclear whether that this discrepancy is due to a simple misunderstanding of the questions, or that it correctly reflects an unconventional policy preference of the subjects. It is possible that since the subject pool consisted of college students at a liberal school in California, the respondents had an inherent preference for international cooperation - even with a country

that they thought of as threatening. Therefore, in *Experiment 2,* we measure the subjects' foreign policy dispositions (cooperative internationalism, military assertiveness, and isolationism, among others) before the treatment phase, and explore their moderating effects.

Experiment 2

For the second experiment, we collected responses in two waves, from August 29th to September 5th and from November 15th to 28th, 2022. A total of 575 UC Davis undergraduate students took the survey, and when we filtered out those that did not pass the attention checks or spent too little time to answer the questions, we were left with 439 responses. The subjects were randomly assigned either to a treatment group or a control group (90 respondents in *economic reasoning – China,* 86 respondents in *national security – China,* 86 respondents in *economic reasoning – Canada,* 90 respondents in *national security – Canada,* and 87 respondents in the control group).

Once again, our sample was not representative of the American population, as all the subjects were UC Davis undergraduate students. For the second experiment, we had 227 female, 200 male, and 12 others. Meanwhile, 388 (88.38%) were American, and 10 were Chinese. About 74.5% of the respondents identified themselves as Democrats, 10.9% Republicans, and 14.6% as Independents.

We do not find direct evidence supporting our Hypothesis B on partner effect. Contrary to our hypothesis, our treatment showed a bigger effect when it concerned Canada rather than China. We suspect that the reason is that trade with China is already overly-securitized in the public's mind insofar as it is difficult to detect an additional treatment effect. Before the treatment, the respondents had a cooler feeling towards China compared to the UK, Canada, and Japan. On average, the respondents rated China 40.34 degree on the feelings thermometer ranging from 0 to 100, while they rated Japan 69 degree, the UK 64.87 degree, and Canada 75.45 degree. Thus, the feeling thermometer score towards China is significantly lower than those for all the other countries. The same pattern continued for the post-treatment measure: the subjects

viewed China as more of a threat compared to the other countries. On average, the overall group gave China a score of 3.58 out of 5-point scale (where 5 indicates that they perceived the country as highly threatening), while the average score for Canada was 1.46, the UK 1.68, and Japan 1.78. Those who received treatment regarding China did not show a higher threat perception regarding China compared to the control group. The t-tests between the control group and treatment groups did not appear to be statistically significant. However, the same treatment seemed to have an effect when the reading passage concerned Canada. While there was not a statistically significant difference between the economic and national security groups, both groups perceived Canada as more of a threat compared to the control group. The control group gave Canada 1.30, while the national security group and economic reasoning group both gave 1.58 on the threat perception measure, and the t-tests between control group and treatment groups were statistically significant at p-value of 0.01. Thus, we find some evidence of trade securitization conditional on trade partners, but it is different from our original hypothesis.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics (Experiment 2)

	Feelings Thermo. (China)	Threat Perception (China)	Threat Perception (Canada)	Trade with China /Canada	Confront China/ Canada	Military Assertiveness	Cooperative Internat.	Isolationism	Xenophobia	Nationalism
Control	39.882	3.721	1.302	2.849; 3.628	2.895; 2.43	2.938	4.163	3.058	2.153	3.41
	(21.443)	(0.978)	(0.634)	(0.964); (0.827)	(1.218); (1.184)	(0.58)	(0.845)	(0.941)	(0.913)	(0.727)
Economic - China	41.644	3.6	1.444	2.556	2.733	2.874	4.011	3.189	2.067	3.3
	(23.116)	(0.909)	(0.781)	(0.766)	(0.981)	(0.558)	(0.838)	(0.876)	(0.704)	(0.79)
National Security - China	40.736	3.489	1.4	2.844	2.544	2.874	4.217	3.294	1.867	3.341
	(24.429)	(1.104)	(0.65)	(0.959)	(1.172)	(0.546)	(0.797)	(0.861)	(0.661)	(0.774)
Economic - Canada	37.72	3.523	1.581	3.174	2.419	2.926	4.163	3.087	2.029	3.345
	(23.015)	(1.003)	(0.789)	(0.785)	(1)	(0.547)	(0.657)	(0.924)	(0.795)	(0.808)
National Security - Canada	41.56	3.593	1.581	3.488	2.341	2.841	4.11	3.174	1.971	3.283
	(24.811)	(1.067)	(0.759)	(0.763)	(1.018)	(0.666)	(0.78)	(0.96)	(0.665)	(0.832)

*Standard deviations are in parentheses.

The below coefficient plot from naive models with different dependent variables show a similar trend (*see* **Figure 1**). Those who read about Canada's potential threat either in terms of economic reasoning or explicit national security concerns seemed to consider Canada as more of a threat than the control group, but those who read about China did not seem to have altered their opinions of China significantly.

Figure 1. Coefficient Plot (Experiment 2)
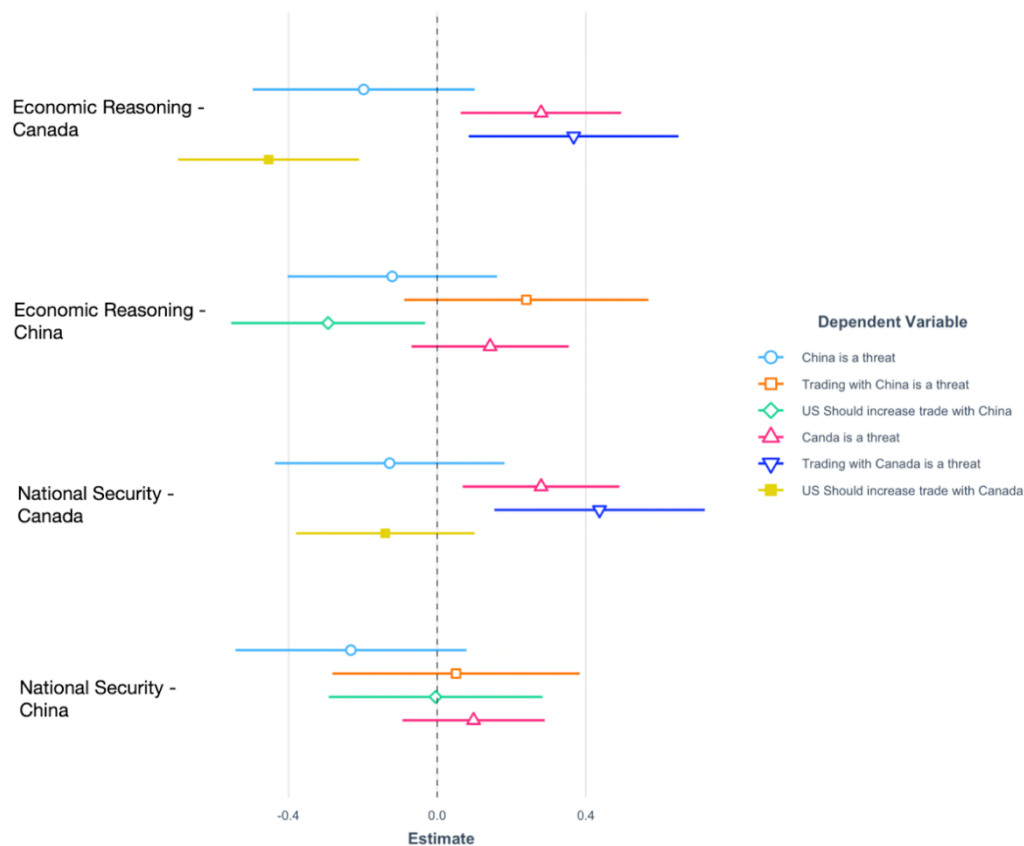
In the second experiment, we once again see that the threat perception does not directly translate into a more aggressive policy preference. When asked whether the US should confront China or Canada "even if doing so increases the chances of a military dispute", those who were treated with the national security passage did not support the statement more than the other groups. In fact, the average support for confrontation against China was lower among the respondents in the national security group (2.544) than among those in the control group (2.895) with a statistically significance (t = −1.946, p-value = 0.05).

However, those who were treated with an economic reasoning, regardless of whether it was about China or Canada, supported less of expanding trade with the partner country compared to those in the control group (*see* **Figure 1**). In other words, although economic reasoning is enough to trigger securitization of trade insofar as the support for free trade with the partner country in question decreased, disinclination against more blatant international confrontation is strong.

When it comes to foreign policy disposition and other prior beliefs such as nationalism and xenophobia, we do not find any significant effect on the securitization effect. This is contrary to our Hypothesis C. The below graphs (*see* **Figure 2**) show that the treatment effects are not dependent on the initial foreign policy dispositions of the subjects, namely cooperative internationalism and military assertiveness. Nevertheless, one characteristic that stands out is that without any treatment, as the military assertiveness increases, one tends to see Canada as less of a threat, whereas one tends to see China more of a threat. Thus, our results suggest that the initial attitude towards China and Canada are different insofar as the securitization of trade also appears in different forms for the two countries.

Figure 2. Marginal Effect Graphs (Experiment 2)

Securitization of Trade with China — Securitization of Trade with Canada
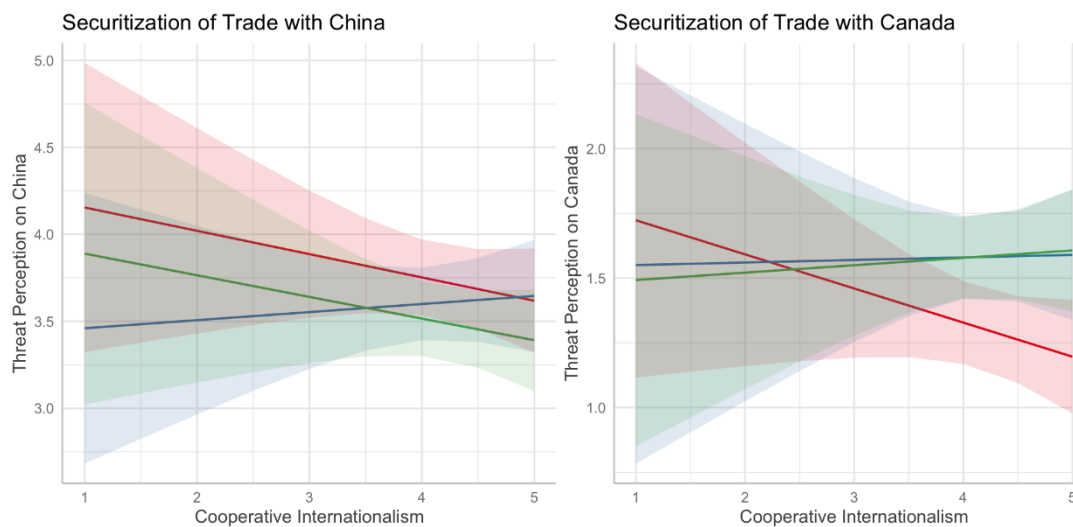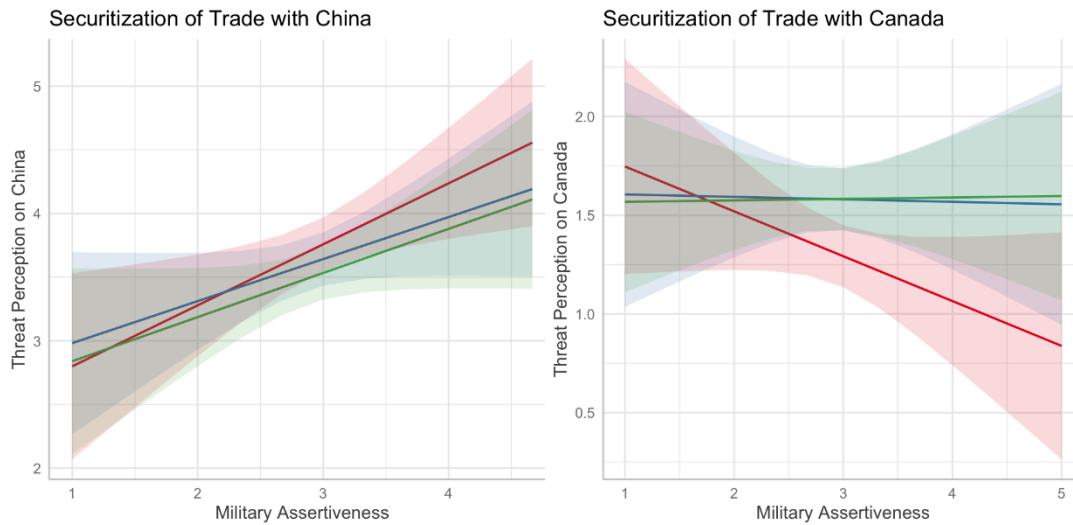
*For all the four graphs above, the red line represents the control group, the blue economic reasoning group, and the green national security group.

Conclusion

Securitization of trade among the American public has been accelerated and amplified in the last few years, as we can see with the 'trade war' rhetoric between the two global super-powers, the US and China. As a result, there is a big discrepancy between what the academics argue about the pacifying effects of international trade and the public's perception of trade. On the one hand, it is easy to discredit public opinion on foreign affairs. However, the public attitude provides important foundations for policy changes. Understanding the roots and mechanisms of public opinion on issues such as international trade could be the key to handle the backlash against globalization and further secure the rule-based international economic order.

Our survey experiments provide three important implications. First, there is a reason to believe that the American public's securitization of trade is at least somewhat related to the real-world power gap between the US and China. Results from our first experiment show that explicitly mentioning the power difference gap between the US and China trigger people to think of trading with China as a national security issue

more than other cues. Moreover, our second experiment suggests that the American public already perceives trading with China as a national security issue insofar as reading one more passage about potential risks, economic or military, about trading with China do not change their views drastically. Second, we find that just focusing on the economic threats is enough to trigger securitization of trade with one of the most benign partners of the US, Canada. In other words, in line with the previous literature on the public opinion being swayed by external cues, if the public repeatedly hears security rhetoric concerning the international trade, they are perceptible to securitize the issue. Third, our results suggest that the American public is still very reluctant to use more aggressive and confrontational policies even when they see the trade partner as more of a security threat. In other words, even if one thinks of a country as a potential military threat, one is still willing to seek more pacifying methods.

Our study is only the first step forward in understanding why and when does securitization of trade occurs. Given that our experiments relied on student samples with a heavy bias towards Democrats, the next natural step forward would be to see if the results hold with a nationally representative sample. We hope to contribute to a better understanding of the public's attitude towards trade and trade partners by continuing our research.

Appendix

I. Instrumentation

Experiment 1

Threat perception

- On a 5-point scale, please evaluate how much of a military threat the following countries represent to the United States. A score of 1 means no threat at all, and a score of 5 means extremely threatening.

    o China

    o European Union

    o Iran

    o Mexico

    o Japan

Positive Policy Cooperation Assessments

- On a 5-point scale, please evaluate whether you favor or oppose the following policies toward China. A score of 1 means you strongly oppose, and a score of 5 means you strongly support the policy.

    o Increase trade with China

    o Increase military cooperation with China

    o Increase diplomatic relations with China

    o Increase cultural exchange with China

Negative Policy Cooperation Assessments

- On a 5-point scale, please evaluate whether you favor or oppose the following policies toward China. A score of 1 means you strongly oppose, and a score of 5 means you strongly support the policy.

    o Use military resources to keep China contained

    o Impose tariffs or other trade barriers against China

    o Reduce diplomatic relations with China

    o Impose immigration restrictions against Chinese nationals

[Post Treatment Questions]

- [Trade policy]

- o Economic tariffs are a good way for the general public to figure out which states pose a national security threat to the US

- [Elite cue VS bipartisan Confirmatory signaling]

  - o A bipartisan recommendation is always worth implementing.

  - o Members of Congress are a good source of information about foreign policy choices.

- [Economic reasoning]

  - o I expect to get a job in my chosen field when I graduate.

  - o The overall health of the national economy is more important than the health of one specific industry.

  - o International trade is generally more harmful than beneficial.

- [Power gap]

  - o The size of a country's economy determines its military power.

- [Final questions]

  - o Overall, dependence on trade with foreign countries is a threat to US national security.

  - o Overall, China is more interested in getting what it wants than cooperating with other countries.

  - o Overall, trade with China is a threat to the US national security.

[Robustness Check wrt Media Source]

- On a 5-point scale, please evaluate how much you trust the Associated Press.

  - o Highly trust/ Trust / Neither trust nor distrust / Distrust / Highly distrust /

  - o Unfamiliar with the news source

Experiment 2

Dispositional measures – Militant assertiveness

- The best way to ensure world peace is through American military strength.

- The use of military force only makes problems worse

- Going to war is unfortunate but sometimes the only solution to international problems

    - Metric: Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree

Dispositional measures – Cooperative internationalism

- "The United States needs to cooperate more with the United Nations"

- "It is essential for the United States to work with other nations to solve problems such as overpopulation, hunger, and pollution."

Dispositional measure – International trust

- Generally speaking, would you say that the United States can trust other nations, or that the United States can't be too careful in dealing with other nations?

    - The United States can trust other nations; the United States can't be too careful

Dispositional measure – Isolationism

- The US government should just try to take care of the wellbeing of Americans and not get involved with other nations.

- The US has the responsibility to play the role of "world policeman," that is, to fight violations of international law and aggression wherever they occur.

- Metric: Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree

Dispositional measure – Nationalism

- How much do you feel that what happens to America in general will be your fate as well?

- I would rather be a citizen of America than of any other country in the world

Attitudes towards globalization/ Xenophobia

- Do you think the number of immigrants to the US nowadays should be.. [1 = increased a lot, 5 = reduced a lot]

- American culture is generally undermined by immigrants [1 strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree]

Potential Mediator Questions

- [National security]

  - National security is not only about military issues, but also overpopulation, climate change, and cyber-security.

  - [Mercantilist view] Countries generally use international trade as a weapon to increase their own power at the expense of other countries.

  - [Fungibility of power] A country's economic resources can easily be used to strengthen its military power.

  - [International interdependence] Increased economic interdependence, such as higher levels of trade and investment between countries, can help promote peace.

  - Having an advantage in advanced technology is essential for a country's national security.

  - [Realist anarchy] International politics is dominated by the logic of 'survival of the fittest'.

- [Economic reasoning]

  - I expect to get a job in my chosen field when I graduate.

  - I am worried about not being able to afford a house in the future.

  - International trade is generally more harmful than beneficial for the US economy.

## II. Correlation Matrices of Variables

Experiment 1
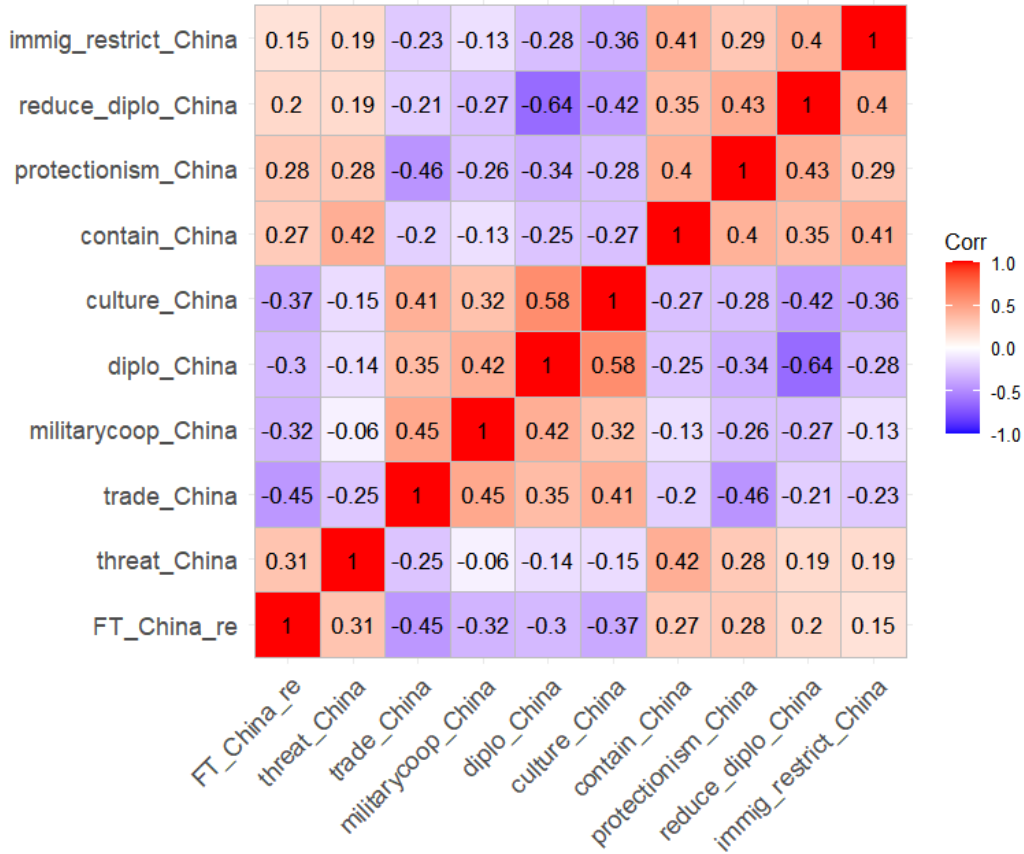
Note that the feelings thermometer measure (FT_China_re) has been re-scaled to be on zero to negative five scale in order to match the threat perception measure (threat_China). In other words, negative five signifies the warmest feeling towards China, and zero, the coldest feeling towards China. All the remaining variables are measured on five Likert scales.

There are four positive policies towards China (*trade_China, militarycoop_China, diplo_China*, and *culture_China*), for which a higher number implies goodwill towards China, and four negative policies towards China (*contain_China, protectionism_China, reduce_diplo_China,* and *immig_restrict_China*), for which a higher number implies more animosity towards China.

Experiment 2
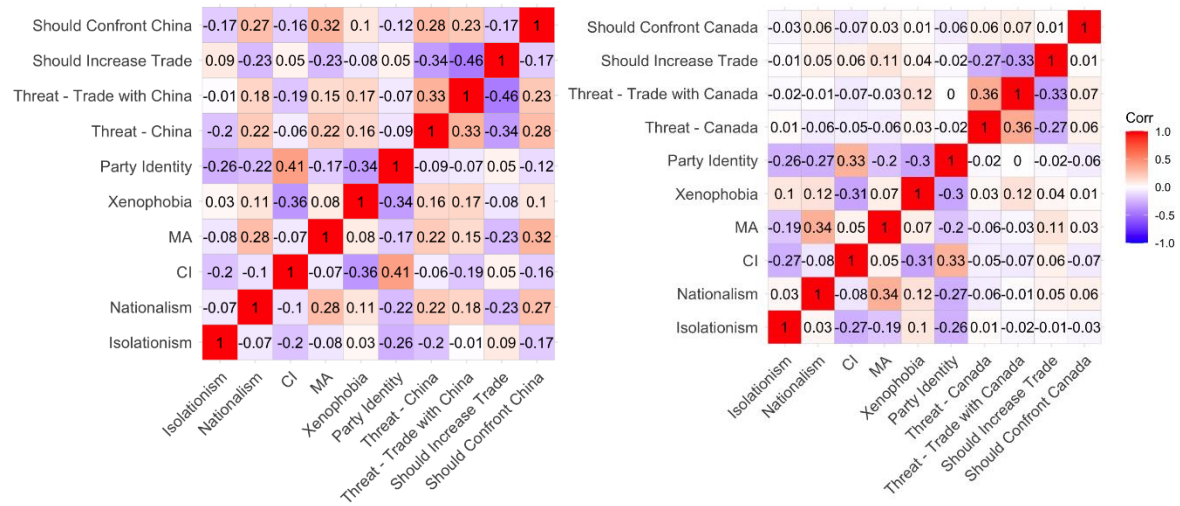
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