



# US-China rivalry in the Global South?

## Insights from a public opinion survey

Richard Q. Turcsányi | Klára Dubravčíková | James Iocovozzi  
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# 1 Introduction

This report is a result of a wide-scale study of public opinion in 15 countries across Africa and Latin America (and the Caribbean), conducted online<sup>1</sup> between June and July 2022 with a research sample (n = 18,224) representative of gender, age, and country region (as well as religion or ethnicity in certain cases).<sup>2</sup> This survey is part of a broader research project, 'Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges,'<sup>3</sup> funded by the European Regional Development Fund and run by Palacky University Olomouc in collaboration with the Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS).

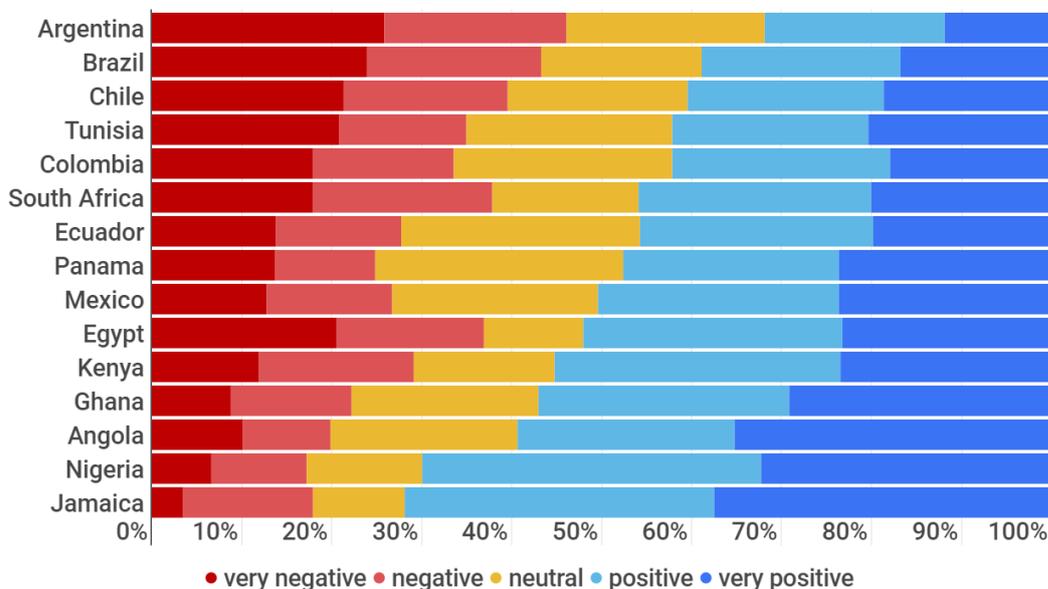
This report summarizes some of the main findings from seven African countries (Angola, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Tunisia), seven Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Panama), and Jamaica as one country from the Caribbean region.<sup>4</sup> While the term 'Global South' would usually also include countries from Asia and the Pacific, this report focuses exclusively on 'developing countries' which are further away from China. Another specific survey report will focus on Indo-Pacific countries which are geopolitically closer to China.

Our findings suggest that if there is a rivalry to win the 'hearts and minds' of the people in the Global South (understood here to be the regions included in this study), **the US is visibly ahead of China**. In each country surveyed, the **US is consistently viewed more favorably and positively than China**. At the same time, however, it would be wrong to conclude that China has lost, as **China is also seen predominantly favorably in most countries**, although tracking behind the US. It seems, then, that people within the region do not see the US and China in the usual black-and-white dichotomy and are not choosing between them. Yet, when they are directly asked whom they would prefer – **the vast majority would side with the US**.

## 2 Feelings towards China, the US, and other countries

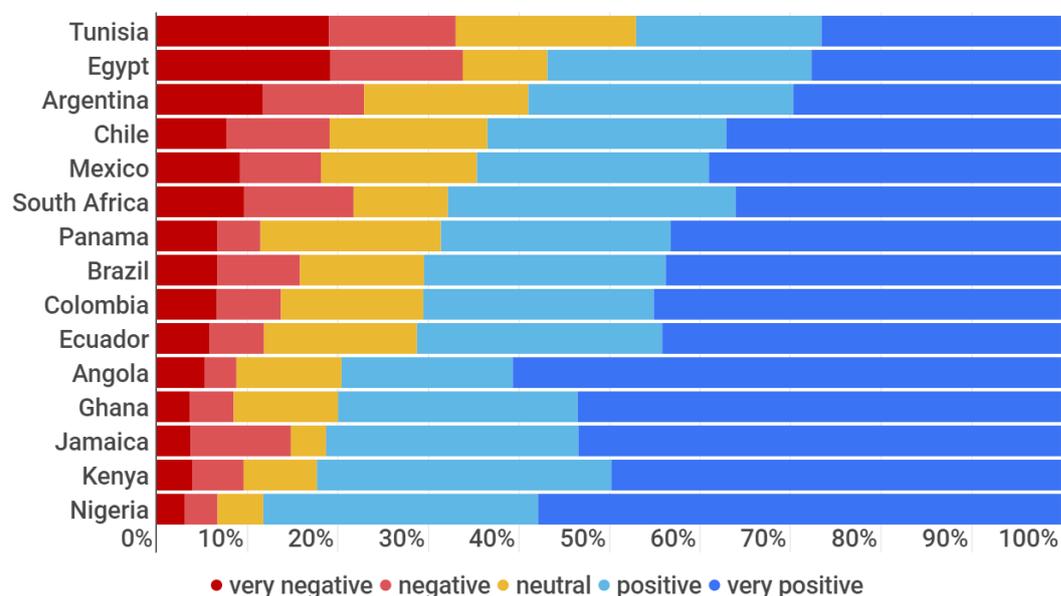
The survey results indicate that **China is overall seen more or less favorably, especially in most African countries surveyed.** Specifically, China enjoys a relatively positive perception in the Sub-Saharan countries, including Nigeria (70% of respondents had positive views), Angola (59%), Ghana (57%), Kenya (55%), and Egypt (52%), where the proportion of respondents with negative views on China remains below 30%. Jamaica stands as the country with the most favorable view of China, with nearly 72% of respondents perceiving it positively (*Figure 1*). On the other hand, the **share of respondents holding a positive view of China is somewhat smaller in Latin American countries** such as Colombia (42%), Chile (40%), Brazil (39%), and Argentina (32%).

**Figure 1:** Feeling towards China in the Global South (% of respondents)<sup>5</sup>



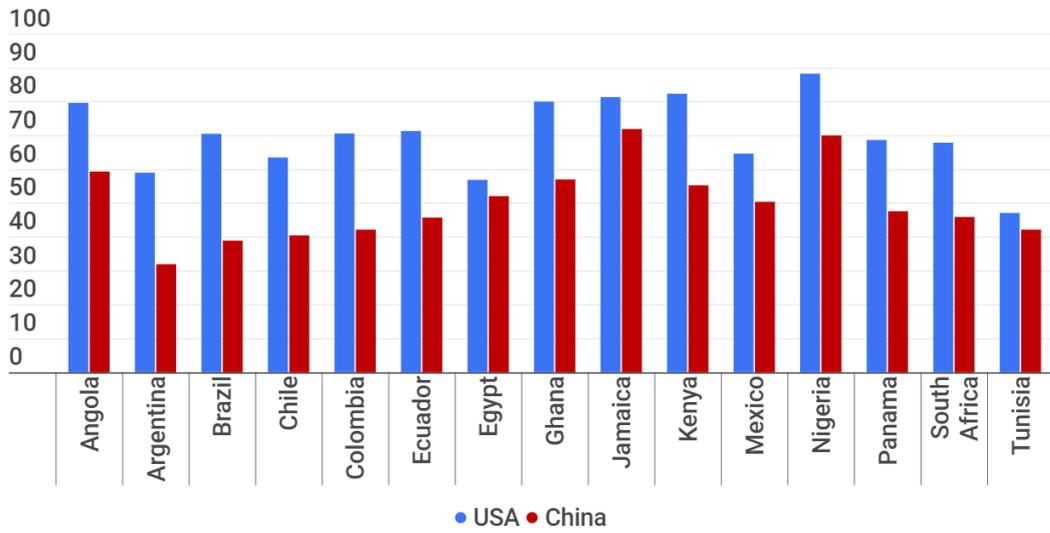
In turn, **the US is seen predominantly positively in all 15 countries** (*Figure 2*). Sub-Saharan countries had particularly positive views of the US (somewhat less so in South Africa), while the two Arab countries in North Africa (Egypt and especially Tunisia) were relatively less positive. Except for Tunisia (47%), more than half of respondents in all the countries had a favorable opinion of the US. The top country is Nigeria, with 88% of respondents holding warm feelings toward the US, followed by Kenya (82%), Jamaica (81%), Ghana (80%), and Angola (80%).

**Figure 2:** Feeling towards the US in the Global South (% of respondents)<sup>6</sup>

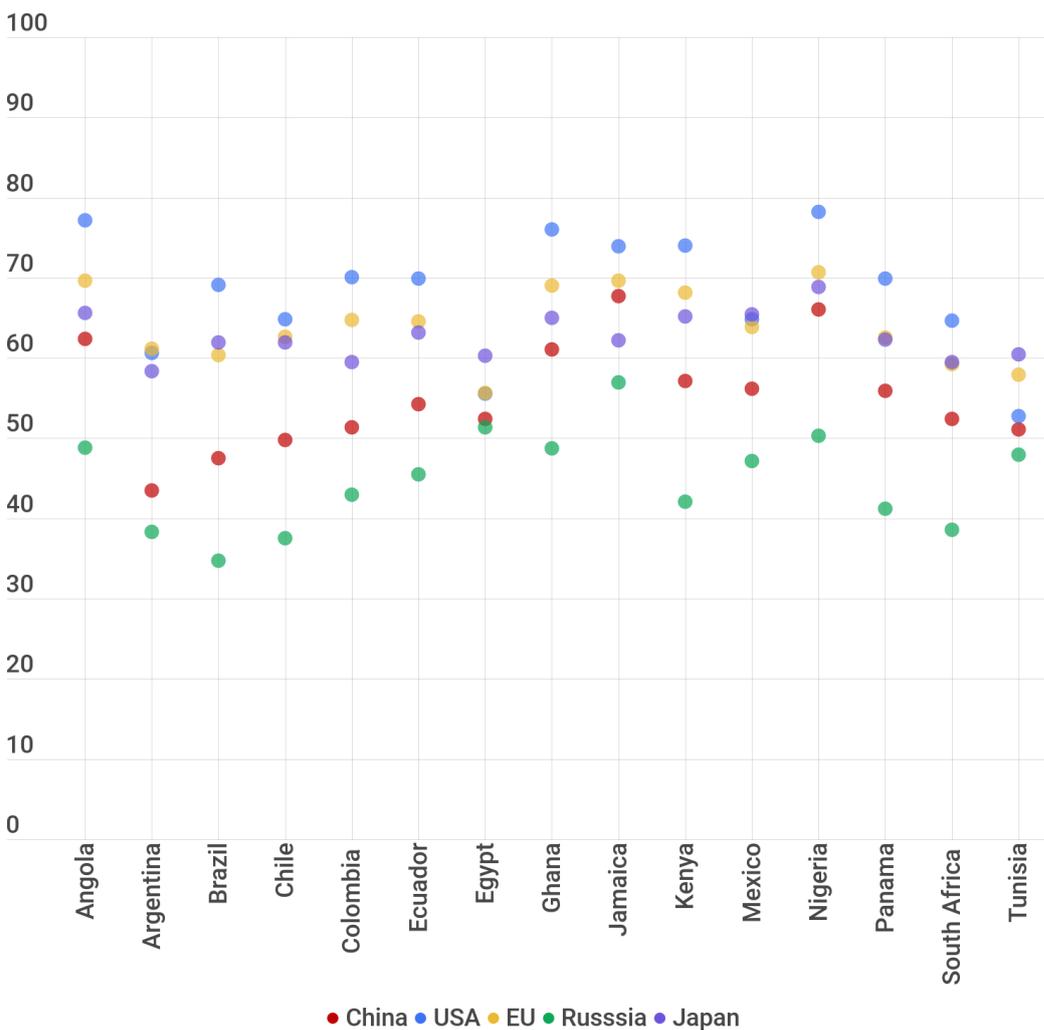


When comparing the views of the US and China (*Figure 3*) directly, it is clear that **the US is perceived more positively than China in every surveyed country**. Whereas in Tunisia, Egypt, and Jamaica, the differences in proportions are relatively small, in other countries, the contrast is much greater.

**Figure 3:** Feeling towards the US and China (% of respondents with positive views)<sup>7</sup>



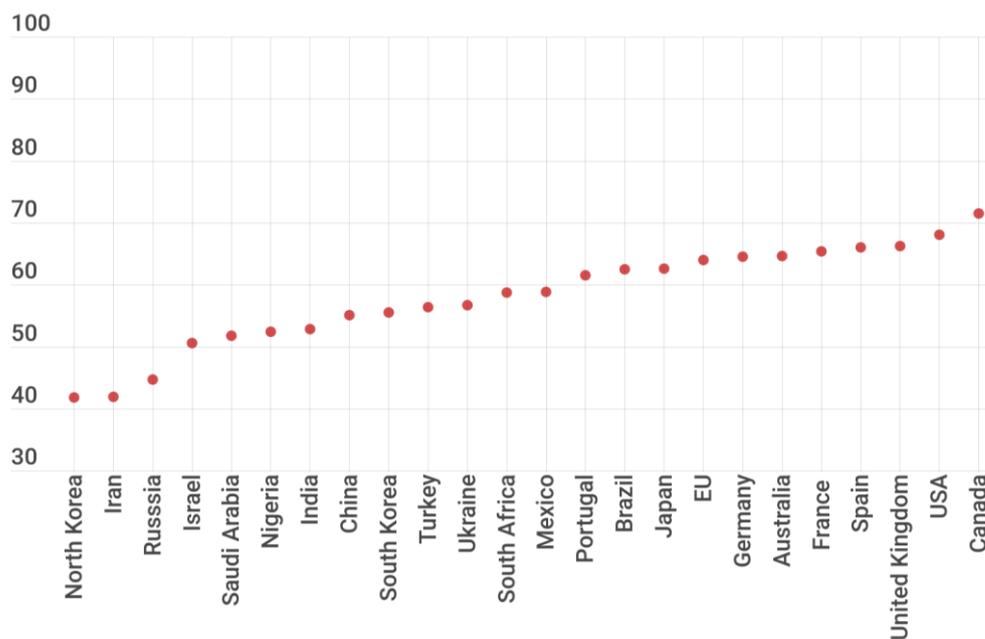
**Figure 4:** Feeling towards the US, China, the EU, Russia, and Japan in the Global South (mean values)<sup>8</sup>



The positive perceptions and preferences of the US in the Global South can also be observed in *Figure 4* showing the mean values of respondents' feelings toward various countries/entities. **The US, together with the EU, is one of the most positively perceived actors.** Japan also receives relatively high scores of about 60. In contrast, **Russia received the lowest scores in all 15 states**, placing it last. China also displays generally lower scores when compared with how other great powers are perceived, although, on average, China is still seen as either neutral or somewhat positive.

In combining responses from all 15 surveyed nations towards other countries, *Figure 5* demonstrates that **democratic countries of the West enjoy the most positive perception among the Global South.** Canada is the single most positively perceived state, being the only one with a mean value above 70. The US, the UK, Spain, France, Australia, Germany, the EU, and Japan also have relatively high average scores between 69 and 62. On the opposite end, North Korea has the lowest mean value, followed closely by Iran and Russia. Israel is the fourth least favored country amongst the respondents, followed by Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and India.

**Figure 5:** Feeling towards selected countries/entities in the Global South (15 countries combined, mean values)<sup>9</sup>

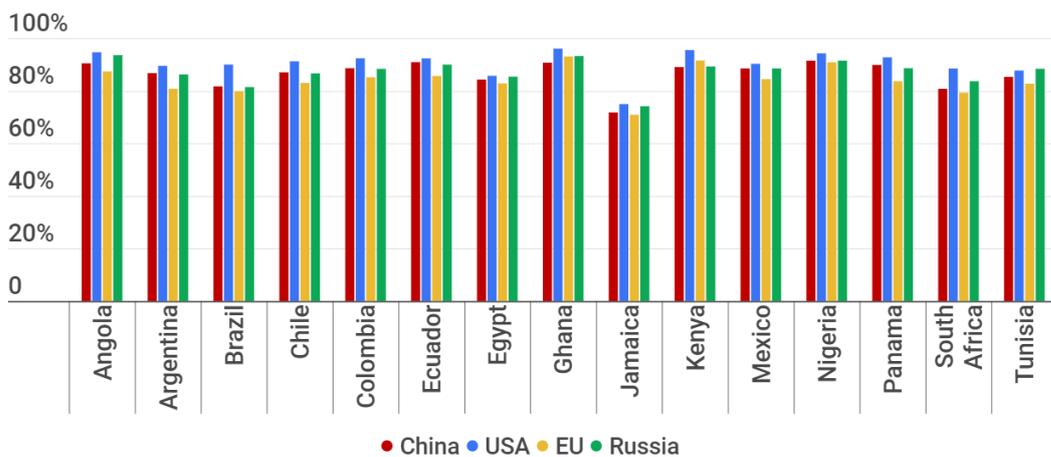


### 3 Comparing great powers

Regarding perceptions of great powers in terms of military might, the vast majority of surveyed respondents consider all of them to be powerful (Figure 6). This is true for nearly 90% of respondents from African nations, however, Jamaican respondents are more reserved as the proportion of respondents who view the four major powers as militarily strong is significantly lower at about 70%. Altogether, **the US is perceived as militarily powerful by the largest share of respondents** in 14 surveyed states, compared to the other three great powers. The only exception is Tunisia, where the largest proportion of respondents selected Russia as militarily powerful (88%).

**China, too, is perceived as strong by the majority of respondents in all 15 countries but compared to the US, the percentage of respondents that consider it strong is slightly lower.** Likewise, the EU is considered militarily powerful by a smaller share of respondents, placing it in fourth place in most countries while still being considered powerful by a significant percentage of respondents.

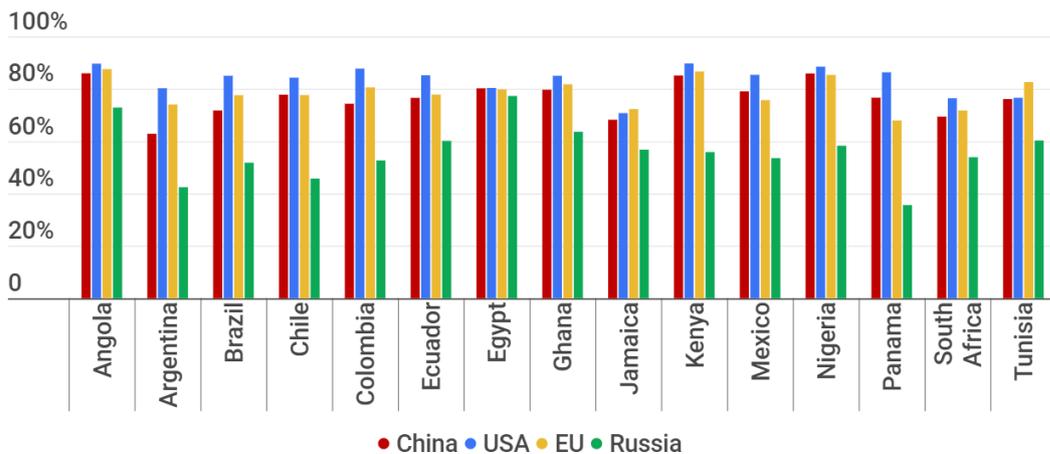
**Figure 6:** Perception of the military power of the US, China, the EU, and Russia in the Global South (% of respondents finding them strong)<sup>10</sup>



**The US is generally seen as the most important for the development of national economies by our respondents (Figure 7).** The EU surpasses the US only in two countries: 83% of Tunisian respondents deem the EU an economically important partner against less than 77% who described the US as such. Likewise, 72% of Jamaicans view the EU as economically important, against 71% who assess the importance of the US in the same manner.

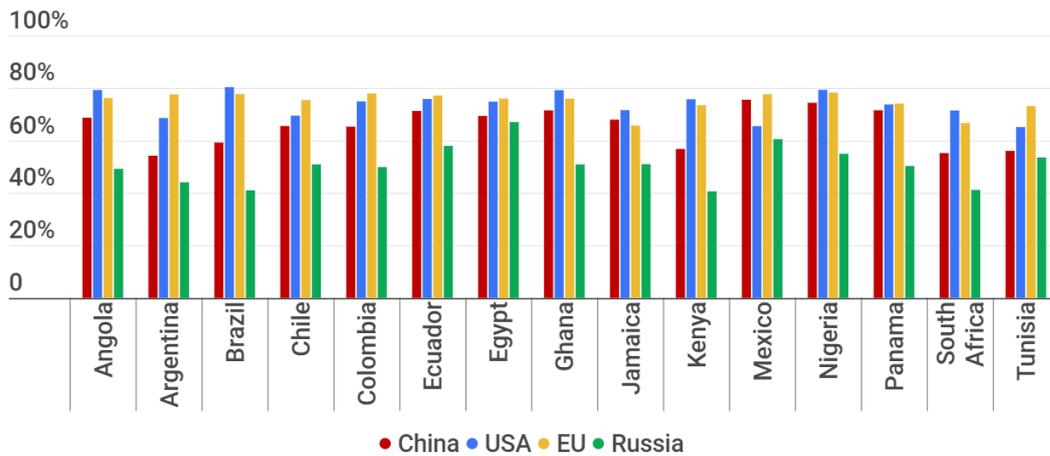
Otherwise, the EU ranks second in most countries. The exceptions are **Chile, Egypt, Mexico, Nigeria, and Panama, where China occupies the second position.** Lastly, Russia is generally viewed as economically important by the smallest share of respondents in all 15 countries, ranging between the highest proportion of 77% in Egypt and the lowest 36% in Panama.

**Figure 7:** Perception of economic importance of the US, China, the EU, and Russia in the Global South (% of respondents finding them important)<sup>11</sup>



In terms of culture, **the US and the EU are perceived as significantly more attractive than China and Russia (Figure 8).** Indeed, Russia is viewed as the least attractive in all 15 countries. While the highest proportion of respondents who find the US and the EU attractive is 88% and 80%, respectively (Nigeria), for Russia, the highest share of respondents who view it as attractive does not exceed 67% (Egypt). On average, about 50% of respondents from all 15 states view Russia as attractive, compared to the average values of 66%, 74%, and 75% of respondents who consider China, the US, and the EU culturally attractive, respectively.

**Figure 8:** Perception of cultural attractiveness of the US, China, the EU, and Russia in the Global South (% of respondents finding them attractive)<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 9:** Perception of political values of the US, China, the EU, and Russia in the Global South (% of respondents finding them positive)<sup>13</sup>

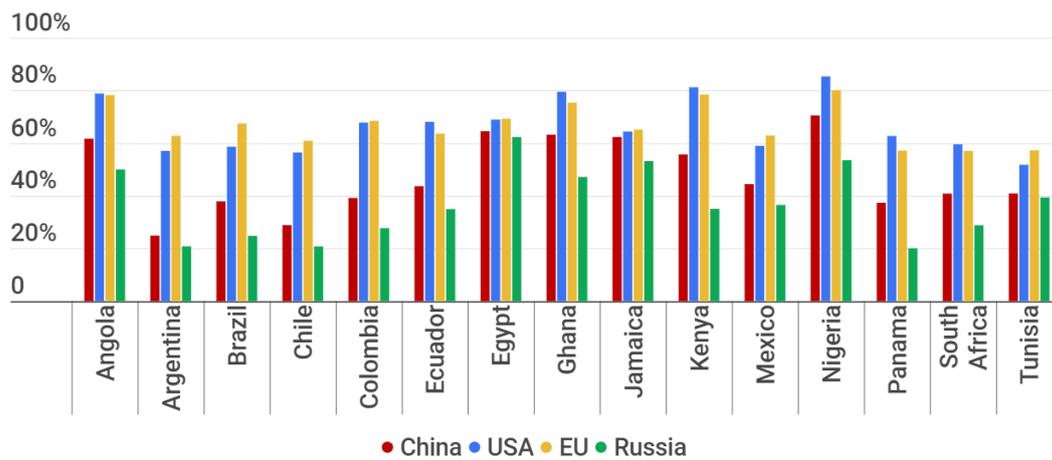
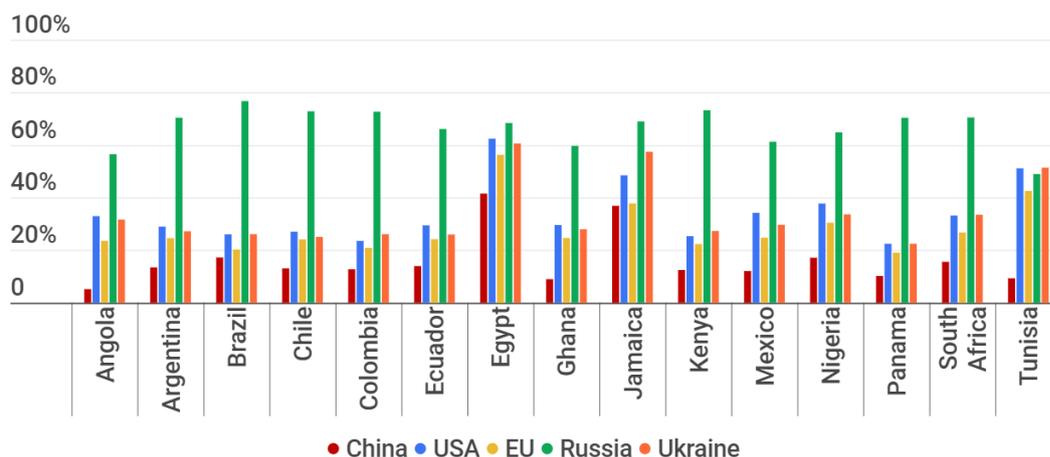


Figure 9 shows that the **political values of the US and Europe are also perceived largely positively** by a majority of respondents in all 15 countries surveyed. Whereas about 80% of respondents from Angola, Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria perceive the political values of the US and the EU positively, that is true for significantly smaller shares of respondents in the cases of China and Russia's political values. In Latin American countries, the proportion of respondents who view China or Russia positively regarding their political values rarely exceeds 40%. Nonetheless, **the political values of China are still perceived more positively than those of Russia**, except for Egypt and Tunisia, where they are viewed positively by a comparable segment of the study population.

## 4 Views on the Russia-Ukraine War

Respondents from the Global South primarily point to Russia as the culprit of the Ukraine war (Figure 10). Russia is to blame for the conflict from the perspective of more than half of the respondents in each country surveyed, Tunisia being the only exception as only 49% of the respondents agreed that Russia bears responsibility, and a slightly larger share of respondents indicated Ukraine and the US (51% for both) as wrongdoers. Apart from Tunisian respondents, Egyptians, too, think that the blame for the war is not only with just one side of the conflict. In fact, **more than half of respondents in Egypt agreed that Russia, Ukraine, the EU, and the US are all to blame for the Ukraine war, and almost 42% of the respondents also think China holds responsibility.** Also, for respondents from Jamaica, the division of blame is not clear-cut, with 69% and 58% of respondents agreeing that Russia and Ukraine are to be blamed for the war, respectively.

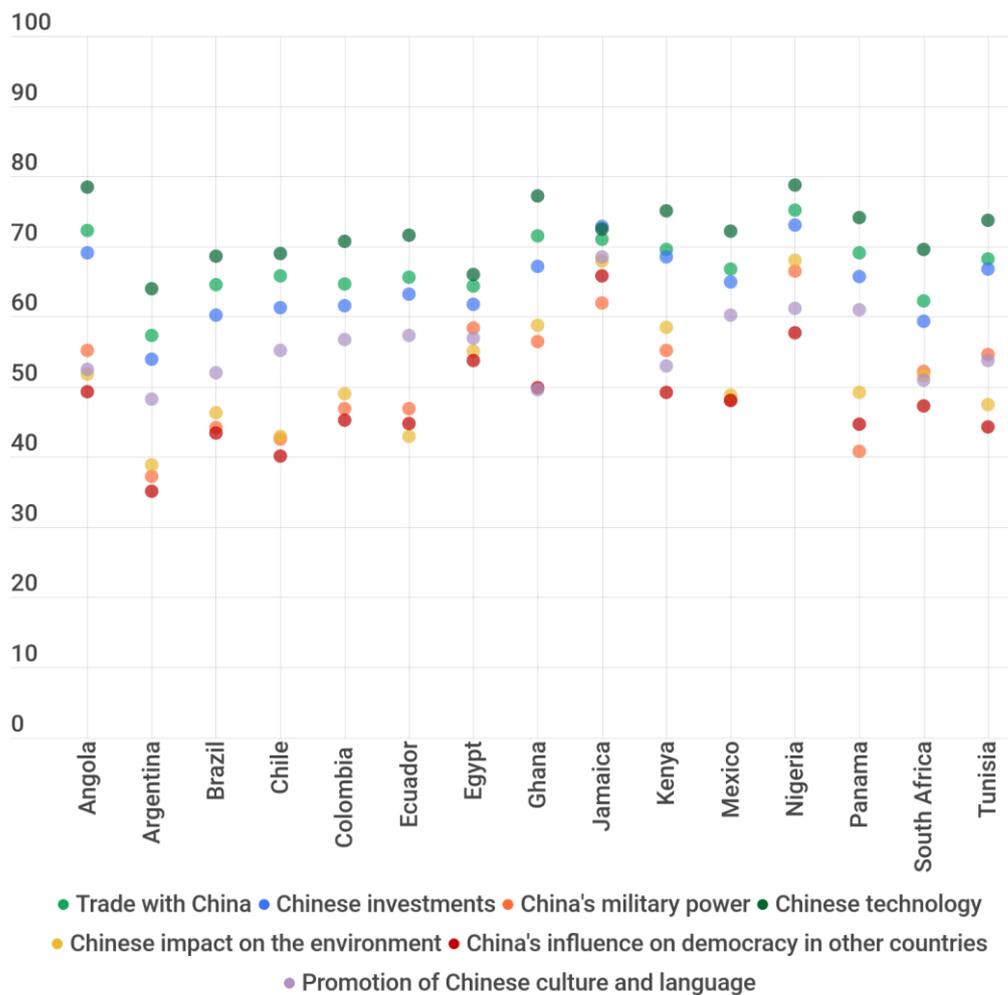
Figure 10: Who is to be blamed for the Russia-Ukraine war?<sup>14</sup>



## 5 Aspects of interaction with China

When looking at various aspects of interactions and issues related to China, **Chinese technology, trade ties, and investments are perceived as predominantly positive** in most countries of the Global South (*Figure 11*). However, Argentinian, Egyptian, and South African respondents appear somewhat more skeptical than others on these issues, with mean scores below 70 for all three aspects.

**Figure 11:** Feeling towards the issues related to China in the Global South (mean values)<sup>15</sup>



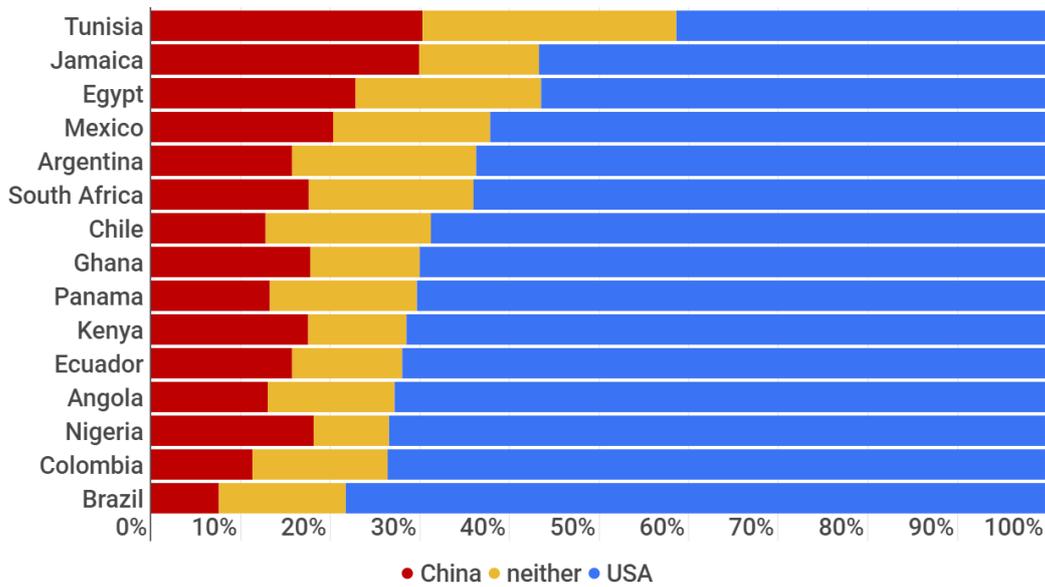
Conversely, **China's influence on democracy in other countries, its military power, and its environmental impact are all perceived comparatively negatively**. Altogether, respondents from Argentina, Chile, Panama, Brazil, Ecuador, and Colombia judge those factors the least positively among all 15 states surveyed. On the other hand, Jamaica, Nigeria, Egypt, Ghana, and Kenya show the highest scores for all issues overall, once again indicating these respondents' predominantly positive perception of China.

## 6 Foreign policy preferences

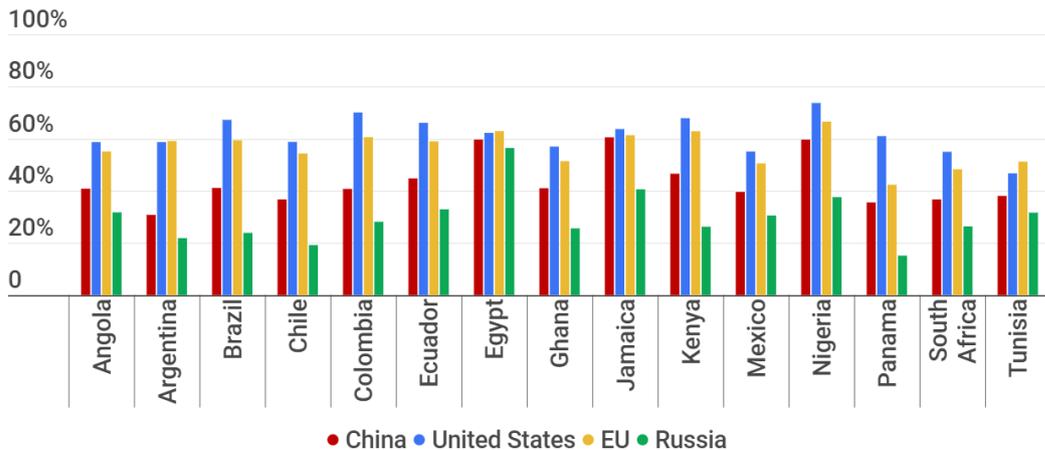
Even though China is viewed positively in some of the surveyed states, as *Figure 12* suggests, favorable perception does not necessarily translate into alignment preferences. A **more significant proportion of respondents** in each of the 15 countries surveyed **would choose alignment with the US rather than China**. This also holds true for countries with a large share of respondents who hold negative feelings toward the US (see *Figure 2*), including Tunisia, Egypt, Argentina, and South Africa. Tunisia appears to be the most skeptical country concerning alignment with the US, with only slightly more than 41% of respondents choosing the US over China (30%). In the rest of the surveyed countries, **more than half of respondents indicated their preference for alignment with the US**, while the proportion of respondents who would align with China remains below 30%.

Indeed, *Figure 13* shows that the **democratic US and EU are significantly ahead of autocratic China and Russia** in most countries concerning the respondents' views on their countries' foreign policy alignment. In Egypt and Jamaica, the differences in respondents' proportion sizes are negligible; nonetheless, alignment with the US (62% and 64, respectively) and the EU (63% and 61%, respectively) is still supported by the largest share of respondents. As in previous figures that compare perceptions of great powers across the selected Global South countries, **Russia again appears to be the least favorable choice for most respondents**.

**Figure 12:** If you had to decide between the USA and China, which would you choose to align with? (% of respondents)

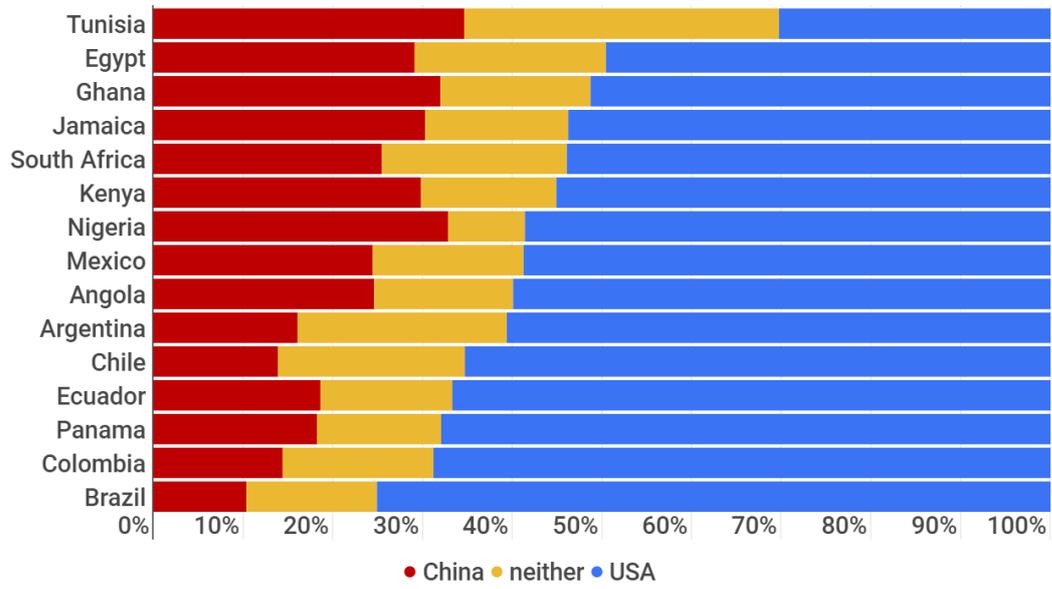


**Figure 13:** How closely should your country's foreign policy align with the following actors? (% of respondents who wish to align closely)



Similarly to the respondents' alignment preferences, **most also prefer the American model of economic development over the Chinese one** (Figure 14). Tunisia and Egypt are the only countries where fewer than 50% of respondents perceive the American model as more suitable. Further, Tunisia is the only country where a more significant proportion of respondents would choose the Chinese economic model (35%) over the American model (30%). **Respondents from Latin American countries like Brazil, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Chile, and Argentina, largely prefer the American economic model**, leaving the proportion of respondents who would choose the Chinese model in the minority with less than 20%.

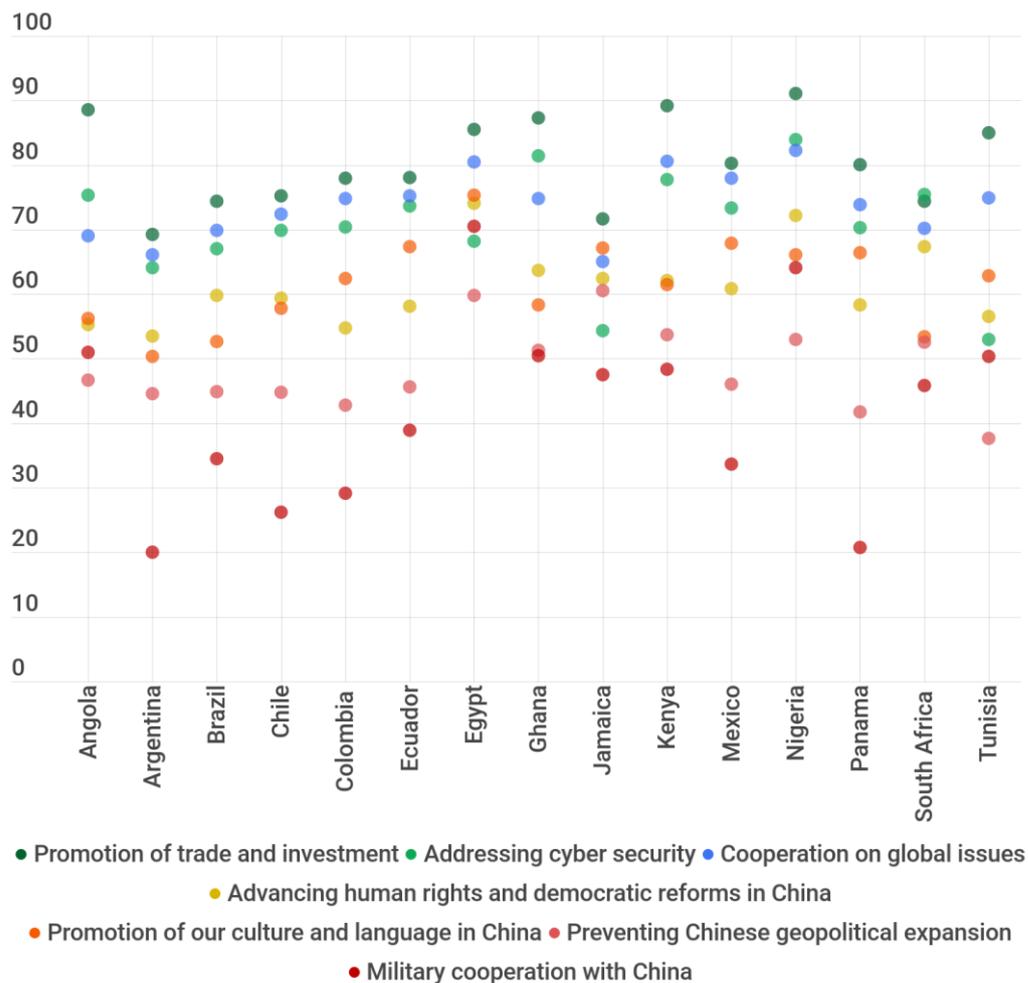
**Figure 14:** Whose model of economic development is the most suitable for your country? (% of respondents)



## 7 Foreign policy priorities towards China

Concerning specific policy preferences related to China (Figure 15), **promotion of trade and investments, cyber security issues, and cooperation on global issues tend to be the most preferred policy options across the Global South**, with most countries' respondents indicating them as the top three priorities, except for Egypt, Jamaica, and Tunisia. Respondents from those three countries included the promotion of their own culture and language in China among the top three categories.

**Figure 15:** Foreign policy preferences towards China (% of respondents agreeing)



**Advancing human rights and democracy is another popular policy preference**, with particularly firm support from respondents in Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa. On the other hand, **military cooperation with China and prevention of Chinese geopolitical expansion are among the least preferred policies**, with generally less than half of the respondents agreeing that they should be a priority of their countries' policy concerning China.

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Due to lack of online panels in Jamaica, the main collection method used there was CAPI F2F (computer-assisted face-to-face interviewing).
- <sup>2</sup> The data collection was coordinated by Focus Agency and in cooperation with their main global partner CINT. The questionnaire included more than 300 data points, including a few open questions, and it took respondents on average about 20 minutes to complete. The questions asked about various aspects of attitudes towards foreign countries (and especially about China), political, cultural, and consumer preferences, views about social issues, and basic demographics.
- <sup>3</sup> Sinophone Borderlands – Interactions at the Edges main page: [www.sinofon.cz](http://www.sinofon.cz). Turcsanyi, Richard Q., Kristina Kirsnska, James Iocovozzi, Peter Gries (2022): *Sinophone Borderlands African and Latin American Survey*, Palacky University Olomouc.
- <sup>4</sup> Turcsanyi, Richard Q., Kristina Kirsnska, James Iocovozzi, Peter Gries (2022): *Sinophone Borderlands African and Latin American Survey*, Palacky University Olomouc.
- <sup>5</sup> The respondents were asked: "How positively or negatively do you feel about China on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 represents cold, negative feelings, 50 represents neutral, and 100 represents warm, positive feelings?" Feelings towards all selected 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).
- <sup>6</sup> The respondents were asked: "How positively or negatively do you feel about the USA on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 represents cold, negative feelings, 50 represents neutral, and 100 represents warm, positive feelings?" Feelings towards all selected 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).
- <sup>7</sup> Supra note 4 and 5. This figure shows the proportion of respondents who indicated positive perceptions of the US and China.
- <sup>8</sup> The respondents were asked: "How positively or negatively do you feel about the following countries/entities on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 represents cold, negative feelings, 50 represents neutral, and 100 represents warm, positive feelings?" and indicated their feelings toward each. This figure shows the weighted mean scores for each country, calculated for each surveyed state separately.
- <sup>9</sup> Supra note 7. This figure shows the weighted mean scores for each country, calculated from all responses across the 15 states surveyed.
- <sup>10</sup> The respondents were asked: "How militarily powerful or militarily weak do you consider the following countries/entities?" and offered a 7-point scale indicating the following options: (1) very weak, (2) weak, (3) somewhat weak, (4) neither, (5) somewhat strong, (6) strong, and (7) very strong. The figure shows the proportion of respondents who selected options 5 to 7 in each state.
- <sup>11</sup> The respondents were asked: "How important or unimportant do you consider the following countries/entities for the development of your country's economy?" and offered a 7-point scale indicating the following options: (1) very unimportant, (2) unimportant, (3) somewhat unimportant,

(4) neither, (5) somewhat important, (6) important, and (7) very important. The figure shows the proportion of respondents who selected options 5 to 7 in each state.

- <sup>12</sup> The respondents were asked: "How attractive or unattractive do you consider the cultures of the following countries/entities?" and offered a 7-point scale indicating the following options: (1) very unattractive, (2) unattractive, (3) somewhat unattractive, (4) neither, (5) somewhat attractive, (6) attractive, and (7) very attractive. The figure shows the proportion of respondents who selected options 5 to 7 in each state.
- <sup>13</sup> The respondents were asked: "How positively or negatively do you perceive the political values of the following countries and entities?" and offered a 7-point scale indicating the following options: (1) very negatively, (2) negatively, (3) somewhat negatively, (4) neither, (5) somewhat positively, (6) positively, and (7) very positively. The figure shows the proportion of respondents who selected options 5 to 7 in each state.
- <sup>14</sup> The respondents were offered a 7-point scale of (1) definitely no to (7) definitely yes. The figure shows the proportion of respondents who selected options 5 to 7 in each state.
- <sup>15</sup> The respondents were asked: "How positively or negatively do you feel about the following issues on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 represents cold, negative feelings, 50 represents neutral, and 100 represents warm, positive feelings?" The figure shows the weighted mean values of all responses in each country.

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## About CEIAS

The Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS) is an independent think tank based in Bratislava (Slovakia), and with branches in Olomouc (Czech Republic), and Vienna (Austria).

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.

To this end, CEIAS conducts and publishes its research, organizes public seminars and conferences, supports education on Asian topics, and communicates with the local, regional, and international media.

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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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