THE CARTER CENTER
EMORY UNIVERSITY
Department of Political Science
CHINA PULSE

Long Thaw, Short Freeze: Chinese Views on the Iran War and Regional Security

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Chinese public opinion toward neighboring countries warmed in the period between late 2025 and the current survey. It then cooled, in many cases significantly, during the late spring and early summer of 2026. Similarly, Chinese support for international hawkishness from Beijing declined beginning in January, only to rise in the weeks after the summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping. The current report covers too many geographical regions, histories, and territorial disputes for the Trump-Xi summit to be a determining cause in all cases of increased hawkishness. As a time marker for comparison, however, it demonstrates a reversal in Chinese public opinion that is otherwise hidden in the overall averages.

The observed hawkishness tracks from increased belief in Chinese superiority over other countries through to support for sending People's Liberation Army troops to aid Russia in its war against Ukraine. Although no data exists to compare views on Iran to late 2025, within this survey, Chinese support for sending naval vessels to protect shipping in the Strait of Hormuz grew to become a clear majority position between April and June. With some exceptions, the overall trend in Chinese public opinion is toward endorsement of a hawkish global posture beyond what Beijing tends to espouse through official statements.

China Pulse is a twice-annual survey research project measuring Chinese public opinion on international relations conducted by The Carter Center and Emory University. The data in this brief come from a survey fielded between April 16 and June 26, 2026.

Key Findings

CHINA & THE WORLD

- Belief in China's superiority to other countries rose from an already staggering majority (89%) before the Trump-Xi summit in May to near consensus (95%) afterward, averaging 93 percent for the period in this survey.
- Although Chinese tend to see most countries in this survey negatively, favorability rose significantly for Russia (from 55 out of 100 to 59 out of 100), Thailand (35 to 39), South Korea (33 to 38), Vietnam (28 to 33), and the Philippines (26 to 30). Singapore and India were also seen more favorably in the current survey compared to late 2025.
- Comparing favorability before and after the Trump-Xi summit reveals significant cooling toward all countries and regions in this survey except the United States and Taiwan. Favorability fell most for Singapore (-10), Iran (-8), and Russia (-8).

IRAN

- In the U.S.-Israel war against Iran, most Chinese would like to see their government call for mediation (60%) and strengthen economic trade with Iran (54%). Providing weapons (23%) and direct military support (15%) draw much less backing.
- Around the Trump-Xi summit, support for publicly condemning the United States and Israel fell significantly, from 47 to 40 percent. Meanwhile, the minority position that China had no obligation to Iran rose significantly, from 11 to 15 percent.
- Support for sending the Chinese navy to protect shipping in the Strait of Hormuz rose significantly after the summit, from 51 to 59 percent, resulting in a clear majority.

RUSSIA

- Chinese support economic cooperation with Russia even in the face of Western sanctions (62%) and even in the face of sanctions against China itself (52%). Yet only one in five support sending Chinese troops to support Russia in Ukraine, and only 38 percent believe China would benefit from a Russian victory.
- Comparing the current survey to late 2025, support for trade with Russia despite the threat of sanctions against China fell significantly (from 57% to 52%), as did support for sending troops to Russia (31% to 22%).

- Around the summit, support for sending troops to Russia rose from 16 to 25 percent. Most likely, this is a result of meetings between Putin and Xi immediately following Trump's visit to Beijing, but this cannot be confirmed in the current survey.

NORTH KOREA

- A narrow majority (52%) of Chinese support continued economic aid to North Korea despite UN sanctions, and still fewer (39%) endorse continued military support.
- After the Trump-Xi summit, the number of Chinese who disagreed with supporting North Korea economically and militarily increased significantly (from 16% to 28% and 26% to 36%, respectively).

SOUTH KOREA

- Should South Korea acquire a nuclear weapon, most Chinese approve of Beijing increasing its military spending (67%), issuing a diplomatic protest (61%), and issuing economic sanctions (56%) in response. A pre-emptive attack on South Korea draws the least support of any substantive action (24%).
- Around the Trump-Xi summit, support for softer options in response to nuclearization fell significantly. Support for a ban on cultural products declined from 42 to 33 percent, support for diplomatic protest declined from 65 to 59 percent, and support for economic sanctions declined from 60 to 52 percent.

JAPAN

- The Chinese public's preferred responses to Japan formally permitting an offensive military are similar to responses to South Korean militarization: increase defense spending (69%), economic sanctions (66%), and diplomatic protest (62%). Launching a pre-emptive attack drew much less support (29%).
- After the Trump-Xi summit, support for bans on Japanese cultural products, already not a popular option, decreased significantly.

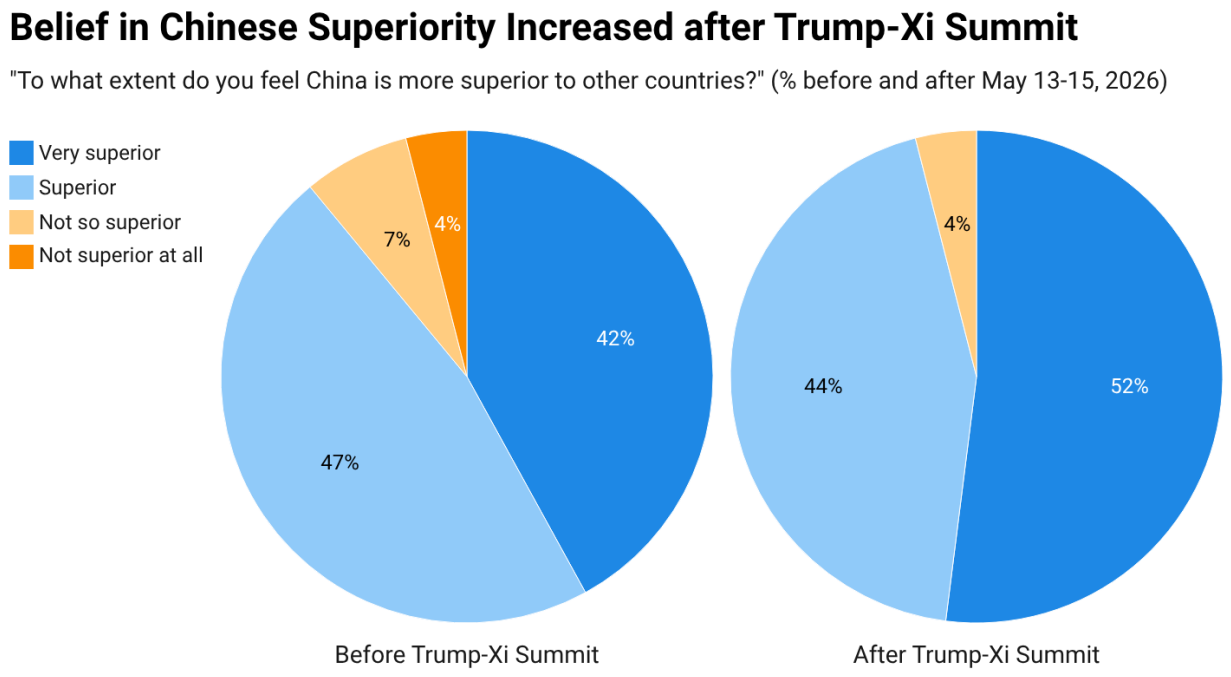
THE PHILIPPINES

- Given three scenarios in which the Philippines offers to bargain diplomatic favors in exchange for reduction to China's claims in the South China Sea (supporting use of force in unification with Taiwan, reducing U.S. military cooperation, and terminating a U.S. mutual defense treaty), all are net unpopular. Support for each fell from late 2025 to the current survey.
- Chinese opinion on bargaining over territorial claims changed little around the Trump-Xi summit.

Nine in Ten Chinese Believe Their Country is Superior

Asked if they believe China is superior to other countries, an overwhelming majority of Chinese agree (93%). Although this near-consensus result is difficult to imagine in the United States or other Western societies, it is not unprecedented for China. A survey conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and The Carter Center in 2025 found that 97 percent of Chinese believed their country was in a strong position in the world, and 95 percent believe it would become stronger in the next five years.

Notable for the short freeze identified around the Trump-Xi summit in May, Chinese surety in their country's superiority increased significantly over the period of this survey. Prior to the summit, 89 percent of Chinese indicated China was superior while 11 percent said it was not superior. After the summit, believe in China's superiority increased to 95% while not superior decreased to only 5 percent.



Net belief in China's superiority to other countries: 89% before summit, 95% after summit - 93% average for all of Spring/Summer 2025

Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

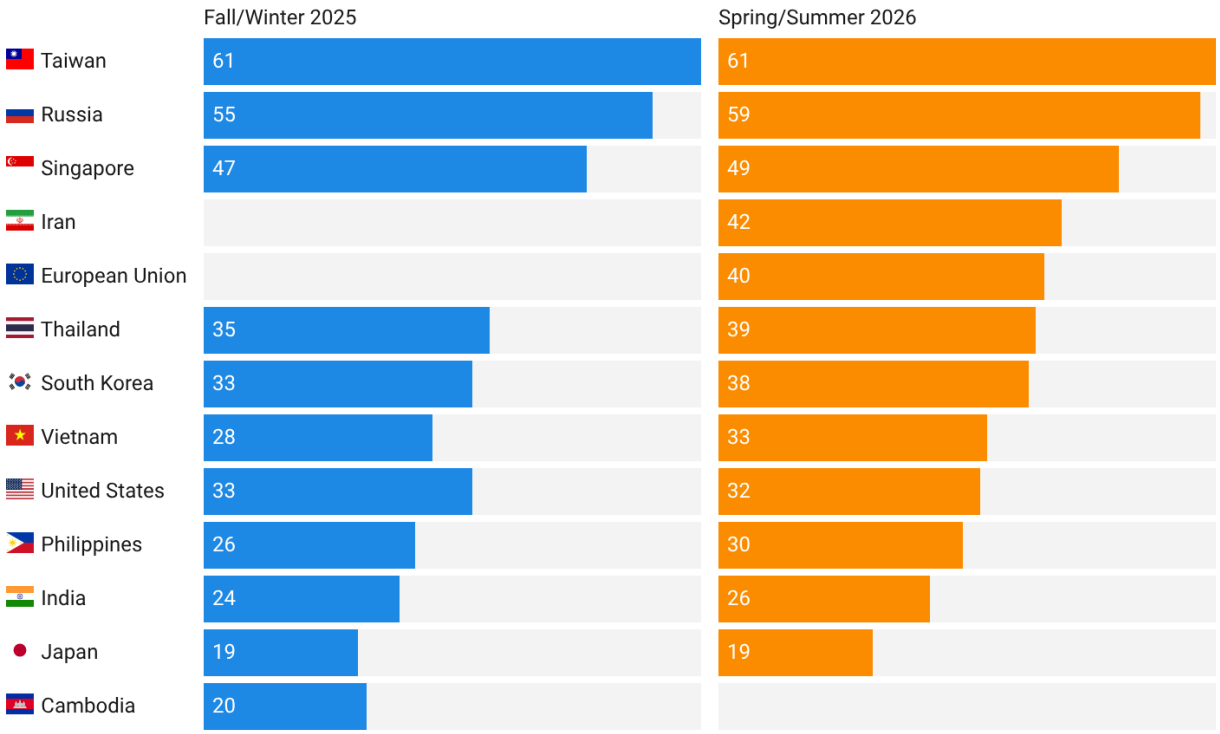
Accompanying this increased nationalist belief in China's superiority, Chinese favorability toward most other countries in this survey decreased in the spring and summer of 2026. This follows a broader pattern in the data. Overall, Chinese attitudes toward most countries

improved between January and April 2026. Around the summit, however, these gains were partially lost.

Favorability toward Taiwan was static overall between late 2025 and the current survey (61 out of 100). Favorability toward Russia (55 to 59), Thailand (35 to 39), South Korea (33 to 38), Vietnam (28 to 33), and the Philippines (26 to 30) all rose significantly, even if many remained negative. Singapore and India also saw smaller favorability gains while the United States remained mostly unchanged. New to this wave, Iran (42) and the European Union (40) both outrank the United States. Japan (19) remains the least favorable of all countries or regions.

Favorability Toward the Other Countries

"We'd like you to rate how you feel toward each of the following countries/regions on a scale of 0 to 100, which we call a 'feeling thermometer.' On this feeling thermometer scale, ratings between 0 and 49 degrees mean that you feel unfavorable and cold (with 0 being the most unfavorable/coldest). Ratings between 51 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm (with 100 being the most favorable/warmest)."



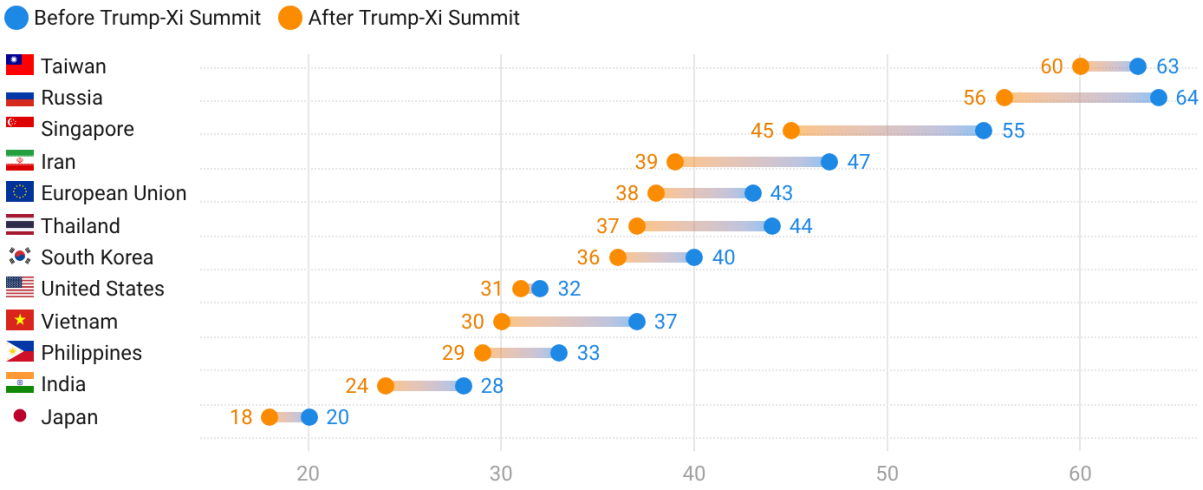
Source: China Pulse | October 2025 - January 2026 | n = 2,506 | & April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center/Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

After the Trump-Xi summit, every country and region in this survey lost favorability from the Chinese public. Some changes were very small. Favorability toward the United States (32 to 31) and Taiwan (63 to 60) was relatively stable. Significant dips occurred, however, for all

others, including Singapore (55 to 45), Russia (64 to 56), Iran (47 to 39), Thailand (44 to 37), Vietnam (37 to 30), and the European Union (43 to 38). Considered together, the two periods (fall/winter 2025 vs. spring/summer 2026 and before vs. after the summit) clearly demonstrate Chinese public opinion toward the world moving in opposing directions, warming from January to April 2026 and then cooling almost universally in May and June.

Chinese Cooled Toward Every Country After the Trump-Xi Summit

"We'd like you to rate how you feel toward each of the following countries/regions on a scale of 0 to 100, which we call a 'feeling thermometer.' On this feeling thermometer scale, ratings between 0 and 49 degrees mean that you feel unfavorable and cold (with 0 being the most unfavorable/coldest). Ratings between 51 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm (with 100 being the most favorable/warmest)." (Average before and after May 13-15, 2026)



Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center/Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

Most Chinese Support Naval Presence in the Strait of Hormuz

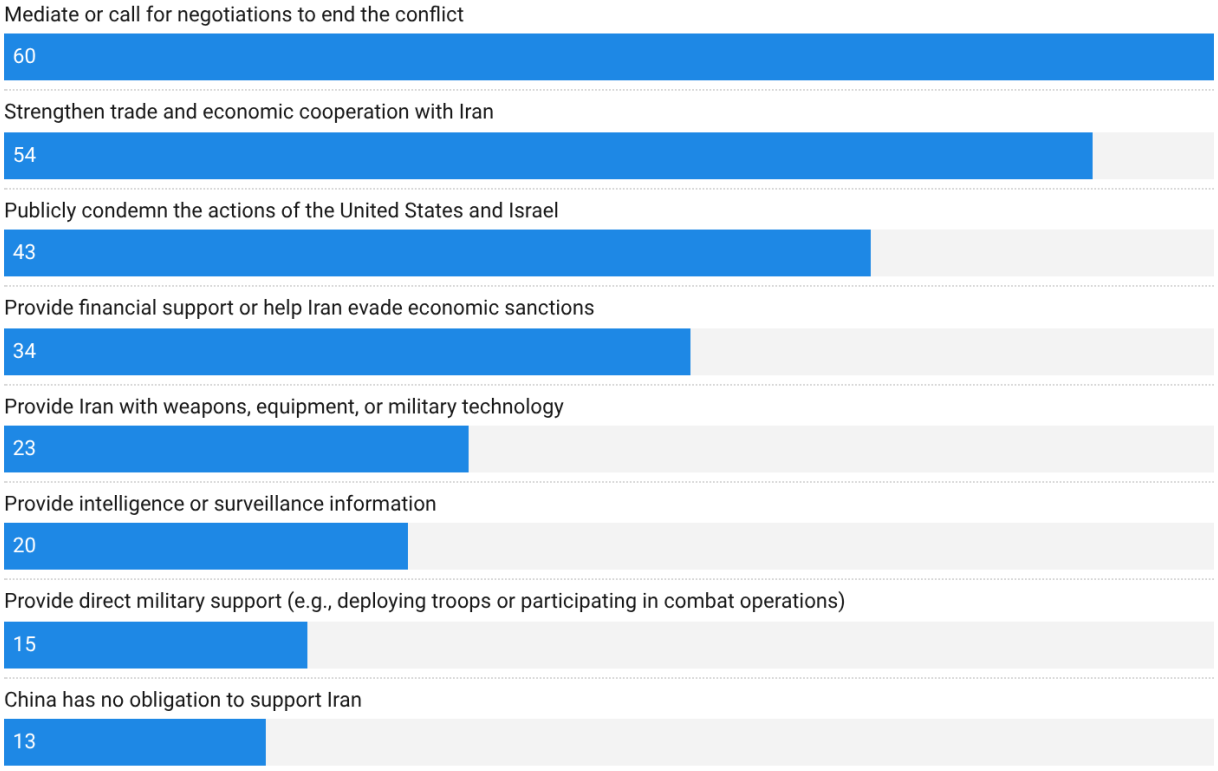
China entered 2026 as Iran's main oil customer, with Chinese oil imports up 16 percent in the first two months of the year as U.S. threats against Iran intensified. After the United States and Israel attacked Iran on February 28, Foreign Minister Wang Yi condemned the strikes, but Beijing subsequently offered Iran little beyond rhetoric. Beijing also tried to balance Tehran against the Gulf states, condemning Iranian attacks on their sovereignty while vetoing a UN Security Council resolution to protect shipping through the Strait of Hormuz. At the May summit, Trump and Xi both agreed Hormuz should be reopened, while Wang Yi backed Pakistan's mediation between Washington and Tehran.

Asked what obligations Beijing has toward Tehran regarding the war, the Chinese public largely follows their government's stated positions. Around the summit, however, support for softer actions regarding Iran generally fell while support for more assertive, hard power responses rose. There also appears to be sharp contrast on the issue of protecting shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

Chinese support their government calling for mediation to end the war in Iran (60%) and strengthening economic cooperation with Iran (54%). A considerable minority also support public condemnation of the United States and Israel for the invasion (43%). Fewer are interested in helping Iran evade sanctions (34%), and roughly one in five support providing Iran with weapons and other materiel. Direct deployment of People's Liberation Army troops is the least popular active response (15%), ahead of those who believe China has no obligation to Iran at all (13%).

Chinese Public Support their Government Calling for Neogitations to End War in Iran and Increasing Economic Cooperation

"In 2021, China and Iran signed a 25-year comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement aimed at expanding cooperation in the areas of trade, infrastructure, technology, and security. In 2026, the United States and Israel launched a series of military strikes against Iran, targeting military facilities and senior leadership. Under the above scenario, which of the following measures do you think China should take to assist or support Iran? Please select all the options you agree with." (% agree).

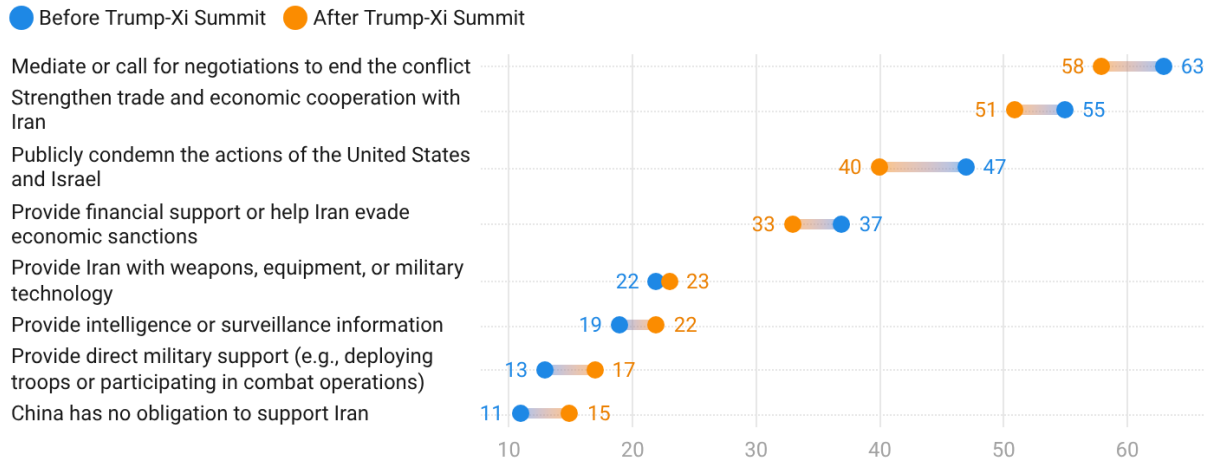


Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

Responses turned more hawkish after the Trump-Xi summit in an observable if not substantial way. Decreasing support was found for mediation (from 63% to 58%), economic cooperation (55% to 51%), public condemnation of America and Israel (47%-40%), and assistance to Iran in evading sanctions (37% to 33%). While providing weapons to Iran held static, support for providing intelligence (19% to 22%) and direct military support (13% to 17%) both increased, as did the belief that China owed Iran nothing in the conflict (11% to 15%).

Majority Support for Diplomatic Responses to War in Iran Decreased After Trump-Xi Summit

"In 2021, China and Iran signed a 25-year comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement aimed at expanding cooperation in the areas of trade, infrastructure, technology, and security. In 2026, the United States and Israel launched a series of military strikes against Iran, targeting military facilities and senior leadership. Under the above scenario, which of the following measures do you think China should take to assist or support Iran? Please select all the options you agree with." (% agree before and after May 13-15, 2026).

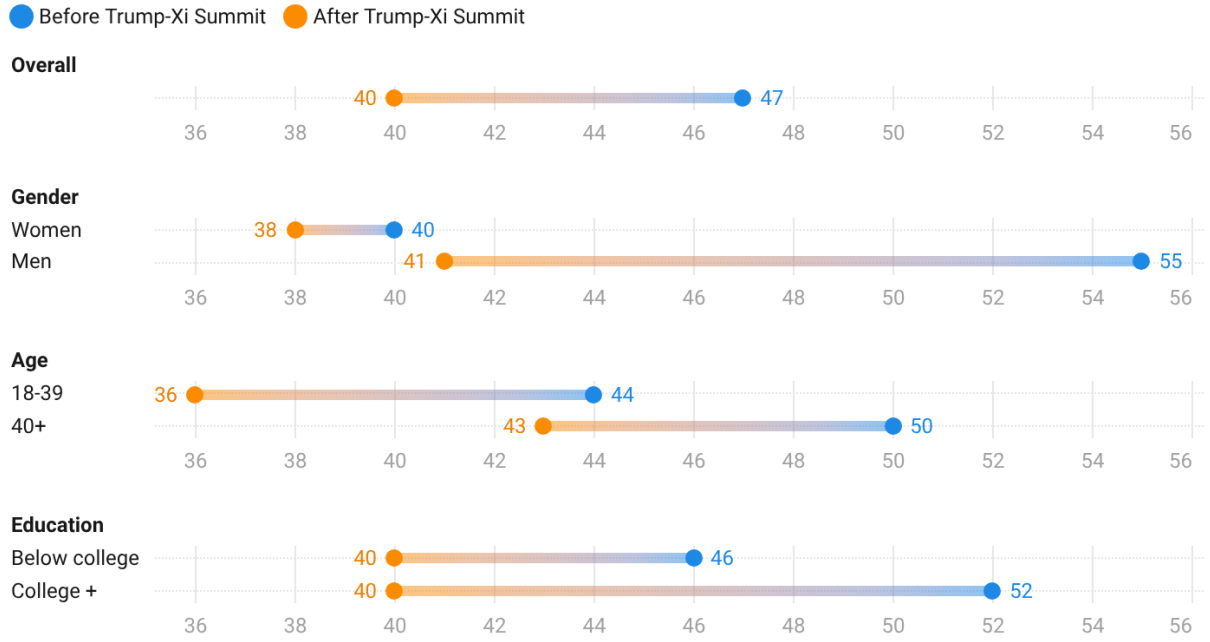


Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

On condemnation of the United States and Israel specifically, the most significant changes occurred for Chinese men, people over 40, and those with a college education. However, support for this response decreased across all gender, age, and education demographics.

Support for Condeming U.S. & Israel Over Iran War Sharply Decreased After Trump-Xi Summit

China should publicly condemn the actions of the United States and Israel in Iran. (% agree before and after May 13-15, 2026).

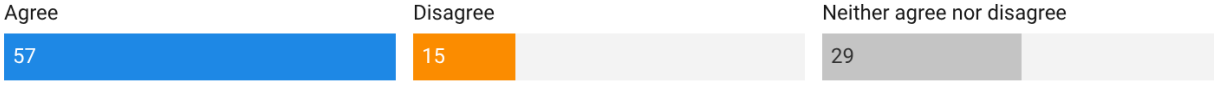


Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

Perhaps most striking, given Beijing's veto of the UN vote to safeguard shipping in the region, most Chinese (57%) support sending the People's Liberation Army Navy to protect commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz while only a small minority (15%) disagree.

Majority Support for Chinese Naval Presence in the Strait of Hormuz

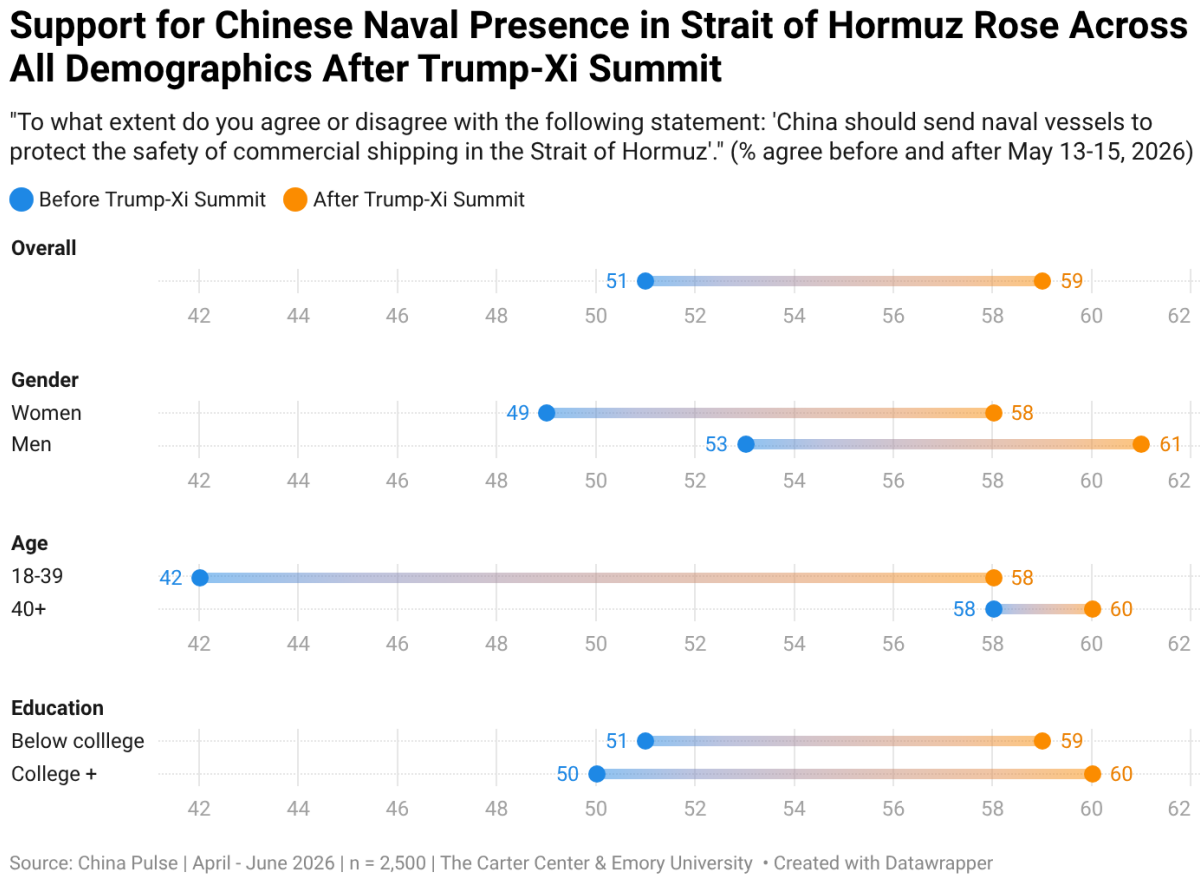
"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'China should send naval vessels to protect the safety of commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz'." (%)



Net agreement: +42 pts

Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

This would be an unprecedented use of China's navy. Although there is no comparison in earlier surveys, analysis of changes in opinion on this issue confirm an increased hawkishness among Chinese in the spring and summer of 2026, with overall support increasing significantly (from 51% to 59%). Looking at different segments of Chinese society, significant increases occurred among women (49% to 58%), people age 18 to 39 years old (42% to 58%), and at all levels of education. Among these, the change in attitude for Chinese under 40 was the largest, confirming an overall pattern in this survey of increased hawkishness among younger generations.

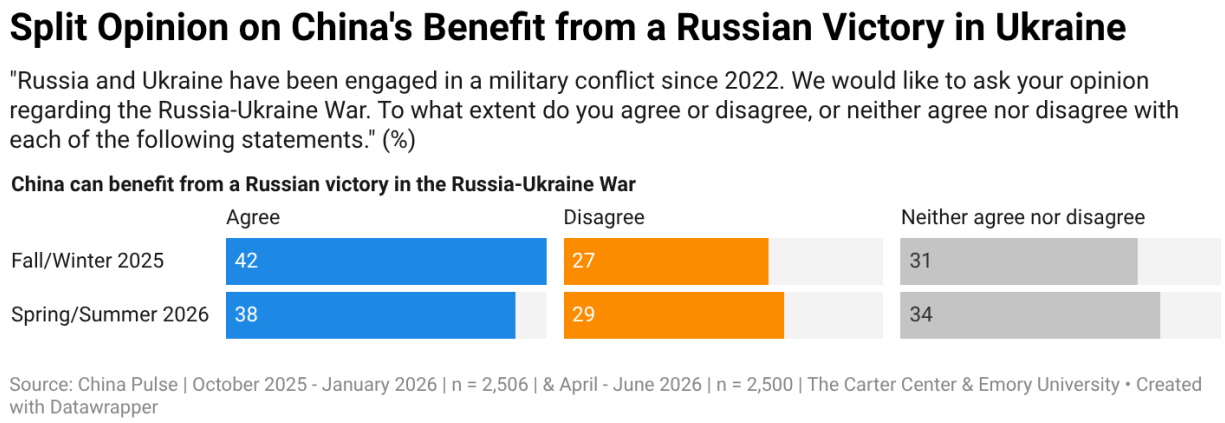


Declining Support for Russia's War in Ukraine Reversed Direction

Beijing and Moscow continued to solidify their strategic alignment in the first half of 2026, culminating in President Vladimir Putin's state visit to China in May to mark the 25th anniversary of their bilateral cooperation treaty. During the summit, the leaders signed over 40 cooperation agreements spanning energy, technology, and trade while publicly emphasizing a shared commitment to counter Western hegemony. This expanding partnership fueled a 26 percent year-over-year increase in bilateral trade during the first half of 2026, largely driven by Russia's redirection of oil exports to China and its reliance on Chinese manufactured goods. Despite this macroeconomic growth, the threat of secondary Western sanctions has introduced friction into their financial ties, prompting a significant number of Chinese banks to halt direct yuan transactions with Russian entities to avoid compliance penalties. Nevertheless, both capitals continue to navigate these logistical hurdles and growing international scrutiny over alleged covert military coordination, maintaining a highly pragmatic and durable partnership.

As with Iran, Chinese opinion toward Russia in the war against Ukraine trended in a dovish direction comparing late 2025 to the current survey but moved in a hawkish direction beginning in mid-May. There is no doubt that the highly publicized meetings between Putin and Xi immediately after Trump's visit to Beijing played a role in these changes. However, it is beyond the scope of the current report to demonstrate this.

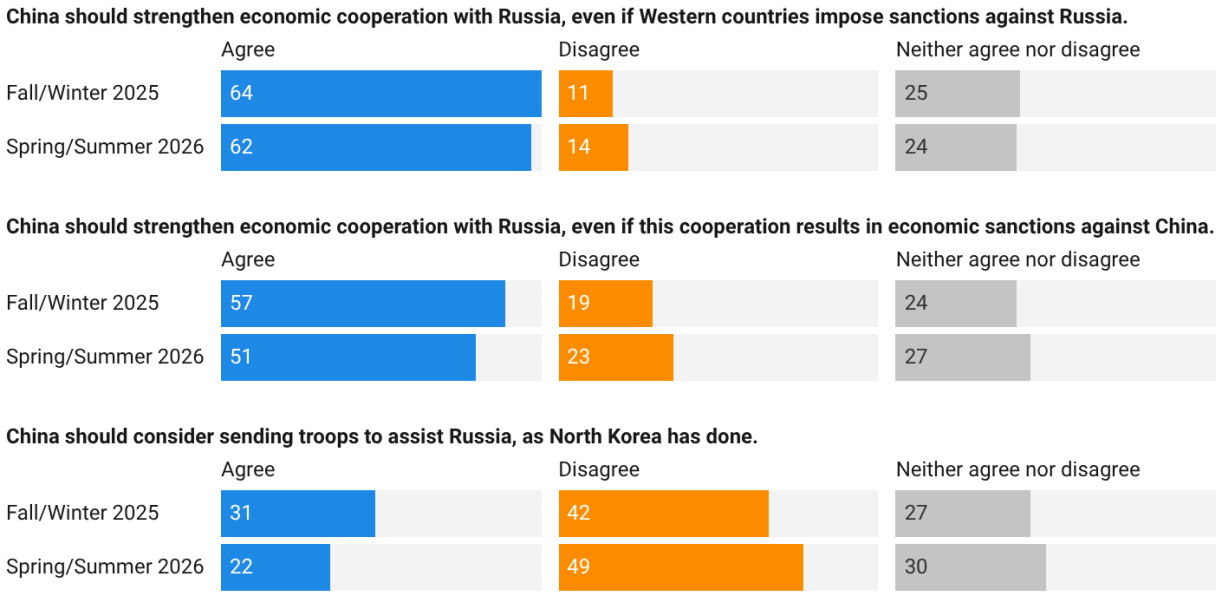
A shrinking minority of Chinese now believe that China would benefit from a Russian victory in Ukraine (from 42% to 38%) while the portion who disagree remains mostly stable (27% to 29%).



If these results can be fairly interpreted as a dovish trend, then they are in line with declining Chinese support for Russia overall. Chinese support for economic cooperation with Russia despite the threat of sanctions against Russia remained largely stable from late 2025 to the current survey (from 64% to 62%). However, support for economic cooperation with Russia against the threat of sanctions against China dropped significantly (57% to 51%), as did support for sending Chinese military to aid Russia directly (31% to 22%).

Chinese Public Supportive of Economic Support to Russia, Not Direct Military Support

"Russia and Ukraine have been engaged in a military conflict since 2022. We would like to ask your opinion regarding the Russia-Ukraine War. To what extent do you agree or disagree, or neither agree nor disagree with each of the following statements." (%)



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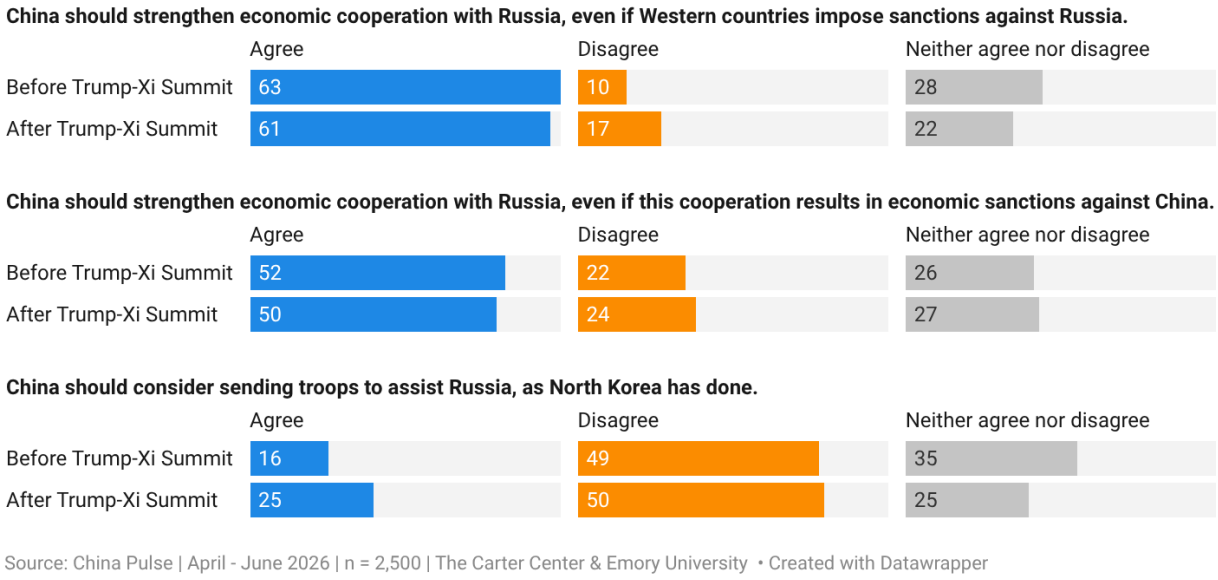
Comparing responses around the Trump-Xi summit reveals that support for economically supporting Russia despite sanctions against Russia is largely static (63% to 61%) within the dates of the current survey, as is support for economic cooperation despite sanctions against China (52% to 50%). However, support for sending troops to Russia underwent a major and significant reversal (16% to 25%). Once again, this demonstrates two currents in Chinese public opinion since January moving in opposite directions. In April and early May, support for sending troops to Russia had fallen to nearly half of what it was in late 2025. After the multiple summits in Beijing in May, support increased by ten points.

Post Trump-Xi Summit Attitudes on Supporting Russia

"Russia and Ukraine have been engaged in a military conflict since 2022. We would like to ask your opinion regarding the Russia-Ukraine War. To what extent do you agree or disagree, or neither agree nor disagree with each of the following statements." (%)



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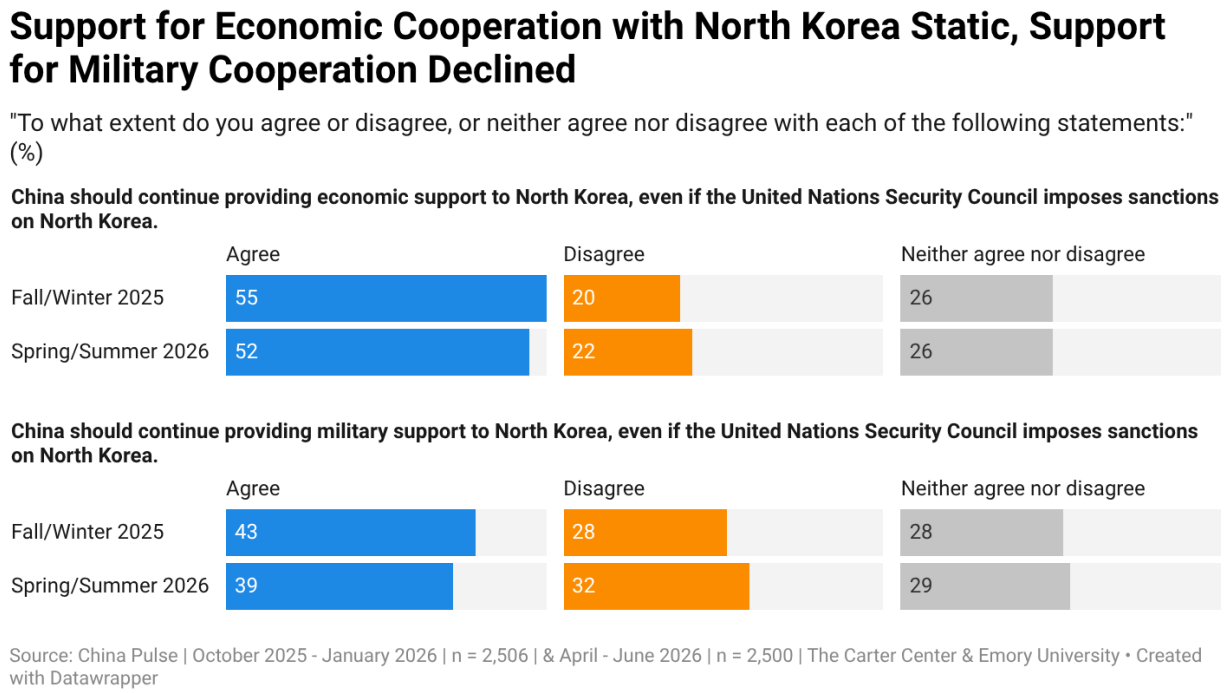
Waning Solidarity with North Korea Bucks the Trend

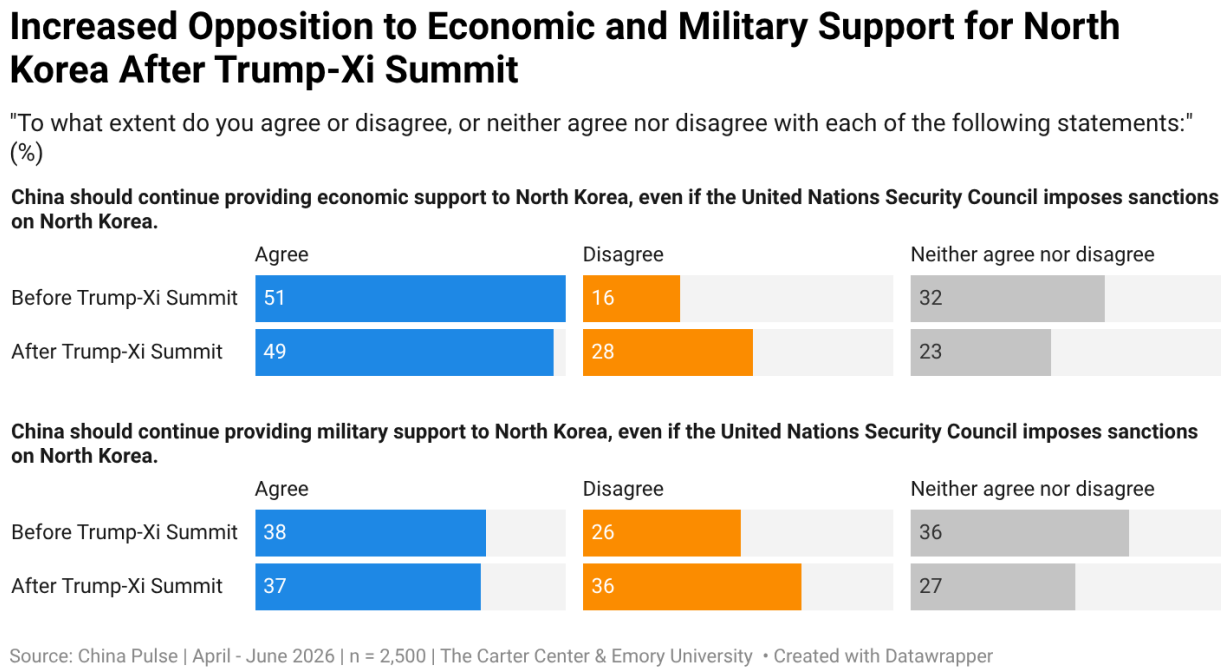
China-North Korea government relations warmed steadily in the first half of 2026, starting with the reopening of transport links. Beijing-Pyongyang passenger trains resumed on March 12th after six years, and Air China restarted direct flights on March 30th. In April, Foreign Minister Wang Yi made his first visit to Pyongyang since 2019, pledging to strengthen strategic communication as Beijing tried to draw North Korea back from its closer military alignment with Russia. On June 8-9th, Xi Jinping visited Pyongyang for the first time in seven years. Analysts noted that it was his first overseas trip of 2026 and that he did not publicly mention denuclearization. Additionally, Xi's summit readout listed military affairs among areas for deeper cooperation, an unprecedented first.

In the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and The Carter Center poll from 2025, three-quarters of Chinese described North Korea as a friend of China. This survey does not ask about favorability toward North Korea but does reveal some signs that cooperation between Beijing and Pyongyang is losing popular support. Chinese endorsement of economic cooperation despite sanctions changed little (from 55% to 52%), but the drop in support for military cooperation was significant (43% to 39%).



Unlike the hawkish turns elsewhere, regarding North Korea, Chinese dovishness increased from mid-May to June. Opposition to economic cooperation increased significantly (16% to

28%), as did opposition to military cooperation (26% to 36%). Agreement on both issues remained the same, indicating that many undecided Chinese developed opinions not in North Korea's favor during the summer.



Chinese More Hawkish on Japan vs. South Korea but No Widening Gap

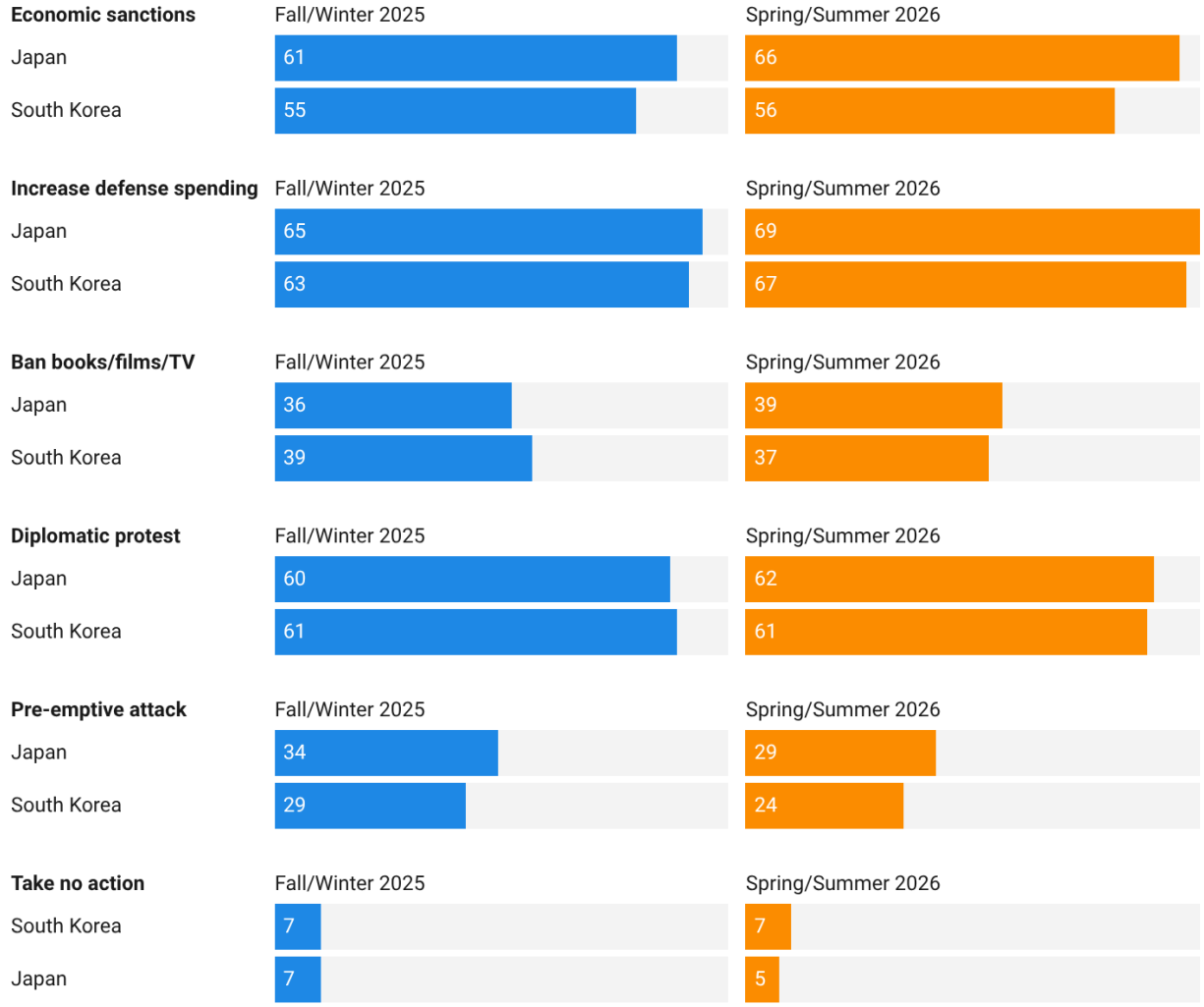
Bilateral relations between Tokyo and Beijing have experienced renewed friction as both capitals navigate geopolitical competition, particularly around Japan's evolving security posture. Following statements linking cross-strait stability directly to its national security, Tokyo accelerated its defense modernization, committing to record military spending and the deployment of advanced defense systems. This continued militarization by Japan remains an ongoing point of struggle, prompting Beijing to repeatedly express concerns over what it characterizes as a revival of historical militarism and a departure from post-war pacifism. In response to these regional tensions, both sides have leveraged economic statecraft, with Beijing tightening export controls on critical minerals and Tokyo championing supply chain resilience in multilateral forums. Despite these systemic challenges to their strategic stability, Japanese and Chinese officials maintain active diplomatic channels to manage trade disputes and prevent operational misunderstandings in neighboring maritime spaces.

In South Korea in early January 2026, President Lee Jae-myung held his second summit with Xi Jinping in two months during a state visit to Beijing, the first by a South Korean president since 2019. Lee called it a foundation for the "full-scale restoration" of ties, and the two sides signed 14 memorandums of understanding and agreed on the importance of resuming dialogue with North Korea. Key disputes stayed unresolved, including China's unofficial ban on Korean cultural content, which the sides only agreed to ease gradually, and Chinese structures in the Yellow Sea. The absence of denuclearization in reports of Xi's above-mentioned visit to Pyongyang in June also matters to Seoul.

Given two scenarios in which both Japan (by amending its constitution to allow offensive military actions) and South Korea (by developing nuclear weapons) commit to increased militarization in Northeast Asia, Chinese are reliably more hawkish toward Tokyo than Seoul. Support for economic sanctions against Japan over South Korea were significant in late 2025 (61% vs. 55%) and the current survey (66% vs 55%). Likewise, although a minority position, Chinese significantly favor responding with a pre-emptive attack against Japan over South Korea in late 2025 (34% vs 29%) and the current survey (29% vs. 24%). Endorsement for increasing defense spending rose significantly and uniformly for Japan and South Korea with no widening gap (from 65% vs. 63% to 69% vs. 67%).

More Hawkishness on Japanese vs. South Korean Militarization

"Domestically, some Japanese politicians have proposed amending Japan's post-World War II pacifist constitution to allow offensive military actions." and "Domestically, there have been growing protests against Chinese immigrants and Chinese cultural influence, and an increasing number of South Korean citizens support developing nuclear weapons. Based on the scenario described, please select all the potential responses from China that you would support." (% agree)



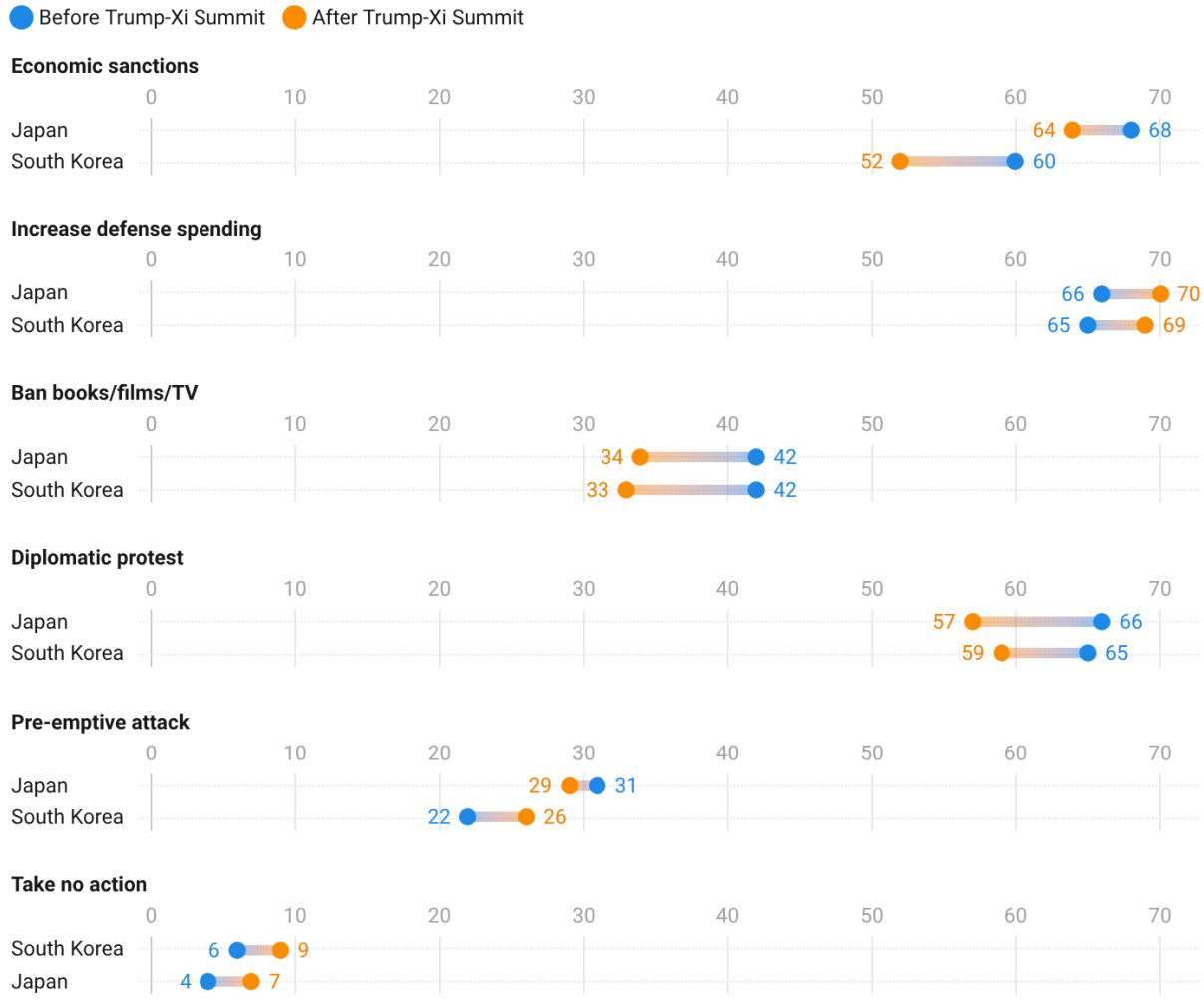
Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

Comparing responses around the Trump-Xi summit, the difference in preference for economic sanctions between Japan and South Korea remained significant but also decreased in both cases (from 68% vs. 60% to 64% vs. 52%). The differences in support for a pre-emptive attack were significant before the summit (31% vs. 22%) but nearly disappear afterward (29% vs. 26%). Support for increasing China's defense spending rose again, but the gap remained the same (from 66% vs 65% to 70% vs 69%). In all, support for the most hawkish response fell between surveys, in keeping with the long thaw trend identified

elsewhere. Unlike Russia and Iran, however, there was no significant spike during the spring and summer. Instead, support for softer responses, like banning cultural commodities, declined significantly around the summit for both Japan (42% to 34%) and South Korea (42% to 33%).

Views on Japan and South Korea Rise and Fall Together

"Domestically, some Japanese politicians have proposed amending Japan's post-World War II pacifist constitution to allow offensive military actions." and "Domestically, there have been growing protests against Chinese immigrants and Chinese cultural influence, and an increasing number of South Korean citizens support developing nuclear weapons. Based on the scenario described, please select all the potential responses from China that you would support." (% agree before and after May 13-15, 2026)



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Space for Bargaining in the South China Sea Closing

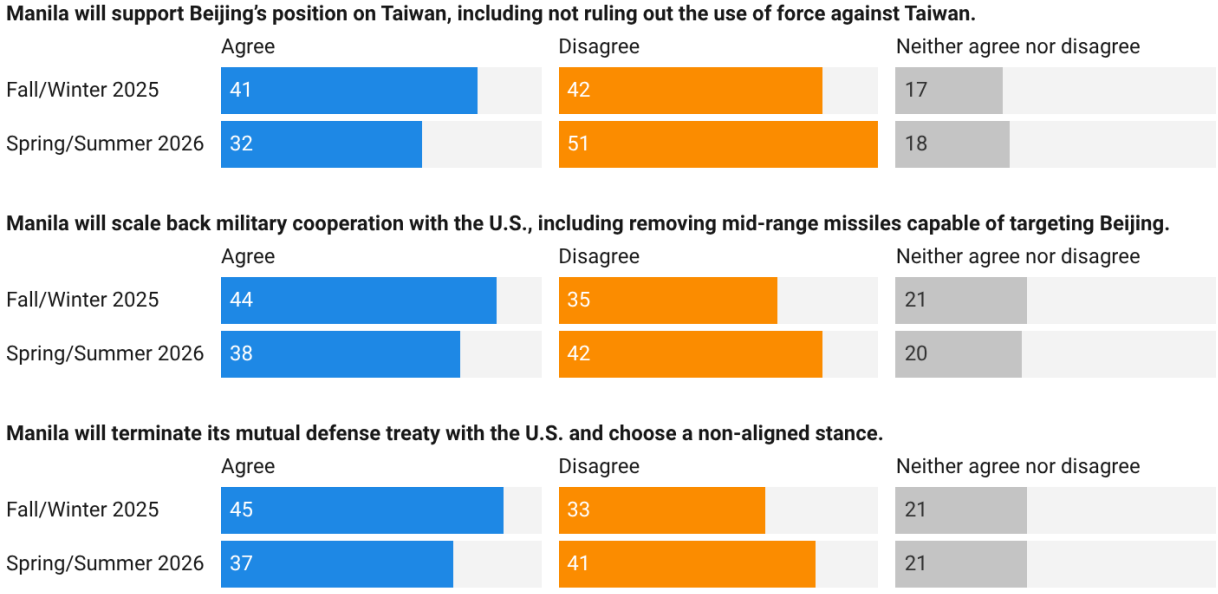
Relations between Beijing and Manila continue to be dominated by mutually contested territorial claims in the South China Sea. Recurring standoffs near areas like Scarborough Shoal prompted Manila to emphasize adherence to international law and a rules-based order. To de-escalate tension points, both foreign ministries convened sessions of the Bilateral Consultation Mechanism to discuss practical de-confliction measures. Concurrently, Manila conducted exercises with partner nations like the United States to support regional deterrence. Both governments continue to balance the management of these disputes with pragmatic connections that bind the two countries together.

In late 2025, the Chinese public appeared potentially willing to accept concessions to Manila in the South China Sea, provided the Philippines stepped back its defense relationship with the United States. This no longer seems to be the case. Instead, Chinese opinion on the Philippines provides a special case. While Chinese were warming to much of the world from late 2025 to April 2026, this is the period when their hawkishness toward the Philippines increased significantly across the board.

Previously, the Chinese public was split on whether Beijing should walk back some of its territorial claims in the South China Sea in exchange to Manila supporting unification with Taiwan, up to and including via the use of force (41% agree vs. 42% disagree). In the current survey, the public's position is clear. Half of the Chinese public believes such a bargain would not be worth it, while roughly one third are still supportive. Similarly, in late 2025, a plurality of Chinese supported their government making concessions if Manila reduced military cooperation with the United States (44% agree vs. 35% disagree) or ended its defense treaty with Washington (45% agree vs. 33% disagree). In the current survey, these numbers have reversed. Although there is no majority opinion, the plurality of Chinese now oppose territorial concessions to the Philippines in either the case of reducing military cooperation (38% agree vs. 42% disagree) or ending the defense treaty (37% agree vs. 41% disagree).

Decreased Support for Bargaining with the Philippines Over Claims in the South China Sea

"China and other countries, such as the Philippines, have territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Suppose the Philippines puts forward the following proposals in exchange for China backing down from its territorial claims over Huangyan Island. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these proposals?" (%)



Source: China Pulse | October 2025 - January 2026 | n = 2,506 | & April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

Little changed in Chinese opinion in these scenarios except for one. After the Trump-Xi summit, significantly more Chinese agreed to concessions if the Philippines ended its mutual defense treaty with the United States (34% before the summit vs. 41% after). Simultaneously, the number of Chinese declining to choose between agree or disagree fell significantly. Support for bargaining after the summit outweighs overall support for bargaining throughout the whole period of the current survey. None of these changes, however, were large enough to reverse the overall trend from late 2025 to the spring and summer of 2026. The Philippines stands alone in this report as the only case in which hawkishness increased significantly in every tested scenario.

Attitudes Toward Bargaining in the South China Sea Post-Summit

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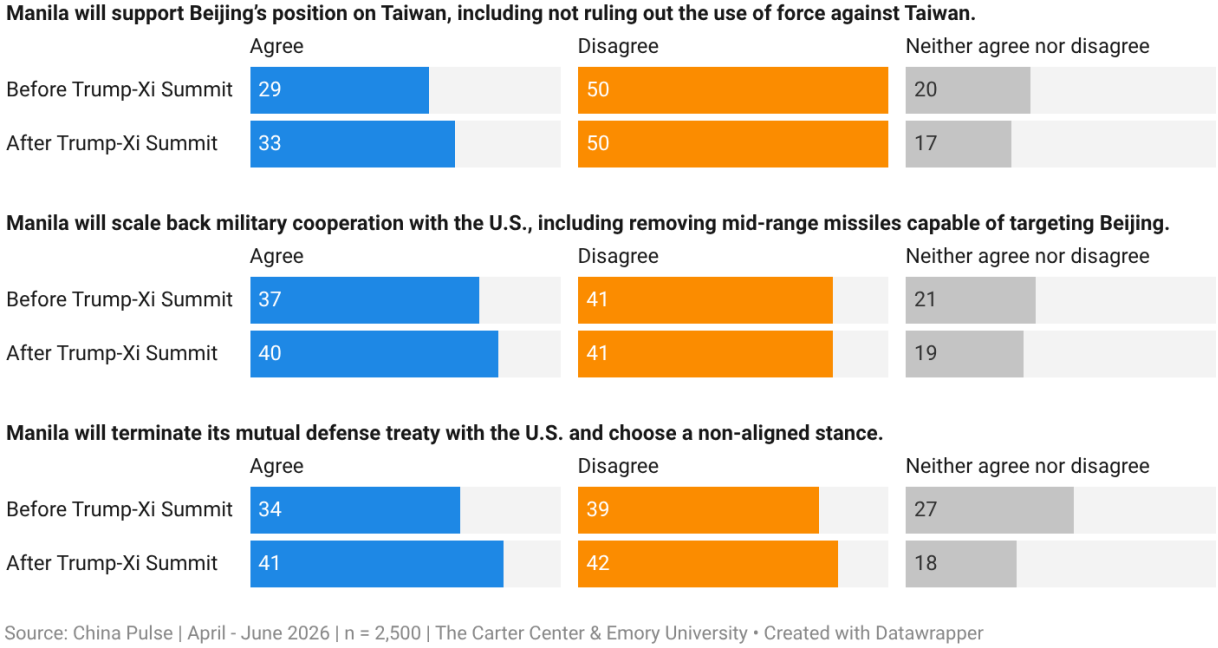

Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

Conclusion

Taken together, this survey and its earlier wave in late 2025 demonstrate that Chinese have warmed toward many of their neighboring countries. However, analysis within the current survey alone also demonstrates that this trend reversed in the late spring and summer of 2026. Although this analysis has used the May summit between President Donald Trump and President Xi Jinping as the hinge point for tracking this change, the summit alone cannot be responsible for this broader trend. Too many other world events occurred just before or during the time when this survey was fielded to narrow the cause of increased hawkishness to the Trump-Xi meeting.

Nonetheless, and despite the likelihood of multiple simultaneous causes, Chinese public opinion became colder toward every country in this survey from April to June 2026. This freezing was accompanied, in many cases, by significant support for more hawkish policies toward China's neighbors and a desire to see China's military act as police and protector in the Middle East, a view that sharply contrasts with government actions so far. As tensions between the United States and China seem to settle into a temporary stalemate, it appears Chinese are ready for Beijing to take a more assertive posture in many other areas.

Methodology

This study employs a repeated cross-sectional design, conducted in collaboration with a China-based survey company maintaining a large respondent panel. The current wave was fielded from April 16 to June 26, 2026, and surveyed 2,500 Chinese adults. Quota sampling was used to enhance the representativeness of the respondents to the Chinese population, including age, gender, and geographic distribution across the North, East, Southwest, Northeast, South Central, and Northwest regions. Weights were applied to the survey sample after collection to further improve representativeness. The same weights were applied to the data from the fall/winter 2025 wave referenced in this report. For this reason, fall/winter 2025 data will not match exactly the figures reported when the raw data was originally published in March 2026. The 50-question survey yielded a median completion time of 8.5 minutes.

Survey weights for each wave were constructed using iterative proportional fitting (raking) to align the sample with population targets for gender, age, educational attainment, Chinese Communist Party membership, and geographic region. Targets were 51% male; 17%, 19%, 17%, and 47% for age brackets 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, and 50+, respectively; 15% with a college degree or higher; 8.5% CCP membership; and regional shares of 12% North, 7% Northeast, 30% East China, 29% South Central, 15% Southwest, and 7% Northwest. We were able to achieve convergence with a maximum relative weight of 5.56 (95th percentile weight is 3.0). Results are not sensitive to dropping the highest weighted observations. Because each wave is adjusted to these demographic weights, differences are likely not attributable to compositional change between waves on these variables. However, unobserved compositional differences not captured by these demographics may remain, although many major sources of compositional change are likely to be absorbed by the listed demographics.

For the pre/post analysis of President Trump's visit to Beijing, we used a coarser common scheme, reflecting the smaller sample sizes of the two subgroups: male 51%, under 40 45%, college+ 20%, CCP member 9%, and the same six regional targets, raking the pre- and post-periods separately and dropping the May 13–15 during-visit respondents. As with the full sample, unobserved compositional differences may remain, although any resulting bias would have to arise from differences not absorbed by the demographic dimensions on which the two samples are balanced.

About the Authors

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The intellectual mission of the Department of Political Science is twofold. First, we seek to engage in knowledge-building through rigorous theoretical and empirical research that enables us to address urgent contemporary political challenges related to democratic institutions and governance, identity and difference, inequality, and political violence. Second, we aim to train students who will become the next generation of scholars and practitioners through the skills we impart to them both in and outside of our classrooms. The rise of political polarization and populism in the United States and other countries make clear that democratic governance cannot be taken for granted. Global crises such as the COVID pandemic and climate change also demonstrate the need for solutions that are not only scientifically correct, but also politically feasible. More than ever, a greater understanding of the incentives and behavior shaping political life is necessary.