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The Domestic Political Consequences of Global Economic
Expansion in Rising Powers: Evidence from Survey Experiments in
China

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Abstract

Abstract: Rising powers typically seek to play a larger role in international economic affairs. This paper examines the domestic political consequences of rising states' expansive foreign economic strategies. We argue that a successful global economic expansion can pay political dividends for national leaders, in the form of increased mass public support. However, when those efforts fail to increase the country's global economic leadership role, national public opinion is likely to turn against the government. To test this argument, we fielded three original survey experiments in China, each focusing on one component of China's expansive foreign economic strategy: the Belt and Road Initiative; the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank; and COVID-19 vaccine aid. Subjects either received no information about international economic efforts, or facts emphasizing either the success or failure of the three initiatives. In all three experiments, we find that information suggesting that China's attempt to expand its role in the global economy have failed reduces individuals' levels of government satisfaction. Our evidence suggests that this operates through a national identity channel: information about failed expansion lowers individuals' level of pride in their nation, and this in turn reduces satisfaction with the central government. This study underscores the domestic political risks and rewards that rising powers like China must weight when expanding their country's global economic presence.

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I. Introduction

Great powers typically seek to play a large role in international economic relations. In the 19th century, the world's most powerful state, Britain, had an over-sized impact on the shape of global trade and financial system. The United States, as the pre-eminent power of the capitalist world, played a leading role in constructing the post-World War II economic order. Unsurprisingly, today's rising powers have also been working to expand their influence in the international economy. China in particular, as the world's largest country by population, the world's largest trading nation and its second biggest economy, has become increasingly active in the global economic arena across multiple realms, from monetary and trade affairs to investment and foreign aid.

In trade and investment, the Belt and Road Initiative has become a flagship national campaign encompassing over 150 countries and international organizations (Xinhua 2019). The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has been backed by broad multilateral support from foreign governments and now oversees over 92 approved projects totaling approximately \$20 billion.¹ China has also greatly increased the size of its foreign assistance programs, including official development aid and, more recently, the donation of vaccines to protect public health and limit the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.² In the monetary affairs, Beijing has worked to promote the international use of its currency, the renminbi. The country has also pushed to play a larger role in existing global financial institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, and has seen its vote share increase in both institutions (China Daily 2006, Wroughton 2010).

The drivers and consequences of China's various overseas economic leadership initiatives have received increasing scholarly attention, and deservedly so. One strand of this literature examines the decision of other countries to participate in these Chinese initiatives, as this is a necessary ingredient for the success of these efforts (Broz, Zhang, and Wang 2020; Liao and McDowell 2015, 2016). Another strand examines the potential impact of this economic expansion on the future of the international system (Johnston 2019, Stephen and Skidmore 2019, Shambaugh 2013, Kastner, Pearson and Rector 2019). A related set of research focuses on the other side of the coin—what international factors motivates Beijing to undertake these initiatives in the first place. Some see these initiatives as part of a plan to reduce China's external strategic vulnerabilities (Friedberg 2018, McDowell 2019b). Others contend that at least one of the major goals is to enhance China's international status and prestige (Blanchard 2011, Wang 2016, Zhou and Esteban 2018, Cai 2018, Wilson 2019, Wong 2019). Finally, some scholarship focuses on domestic motivations and drivers, from excess capacity and regional inequality to bureaucratic politics (Duckett and Stepan 2018, Jaros and Tan 2020, He 2018, Yu 2017, Chan 2017, Lin and Katada 2020, Cai 2017; Ye 2019, Li and Zeng 2019, Evron 2019).

While existing research has shed considerable light on why China has expanded its global economic influence and the potential repercussions at the international level, we still know little about the *domestic* political consequences of these efforts. We examine how efforts to expand the country's role in the global economy impact public support for China's central leadership. Specifically, we explore whether successfully

¹ See the AIIB website at <https://www.aiib.org/en/projects/summary/index.html>

² See the AidData website at <https://www.aiddata.org/china-official-finance>

enlarging the country's role in the global economy has paid domestic political dividends for China's central leadership and whether failure to achieve these objectives undermines the Party's popularity.

This is an important question because the longer-term sustainability of these initiatives depends at least in part on mass public opinion. Emerging research points to public opinion as having a substantial impact on the foreign policies of authoritarian regimes (Hyde and Saunders 2020). Moreover, research has found that the Chinese government itself is highly attuned to and responsive to public attitudes on both domestic and foreign policy issues (Chen, Pan, and Xu 2016; Distelhorst and Hou 2017, Weiss 2014; Zhao 2013). This concern of China's leadership is revealed in their own public remarks: in a 2013 Central Committee speech, for example, Xi Jinping asserted that "winning or losing public support is an issue that concerns the CPC's survival or extinction" (quoted in Weiss 2019, 679). A fuller understanding of China's global economic leadership therefore requires investigation into the role of mass public opinion.

To test our argument that global economic leadership influences support for China's central government, we fielded three online survey experiments between 2019 and 2021. The experiments focused on three different overseas economic initiatives: the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); and the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB); and COVID-19 vaccine aid. In each experiment, subjects were randomly assigned to receive different information about these programs suggesting either that these initiatives had seen successful expansion, or had been met by a lack of progress. We find that individuals who were provided facts on how China has failed to effectively expand its global economic presence had more negative evaluations of the government. Additional analyses indicate that our failed expansion treatment reduced subjects' satisfaction with the government through an identity-based mechanism: unsuccessful international expansion depresses the level of pride, and this contributes to a decrease in government satisfaction. Conversely, we find little support that treatments operate through an economic-based mechanism. Taken together, the evidence supports the claim that there are domestic, not just international, consequences of rising powers' efforts to expand their economic influence.

These findings have important implications for international relations, comparative politics, and political behavior. This study brings attention to an overlooked dimension of Chinese economic statecraft—that of domestic public opinion. Our findings indicate that Beijing has an incentive to take mass public support into account when considering its foreign economic policy choices. On the one hand, top CCP officials stand to reap a domestic political dividend from global economic expansion. At the same time, our evidence suggests that the CCP's international economic strategy is not without some potentially serious risks: failure to achieve these aims could cost the Party support among the mass public. Our evidence suggests that the downside risks of failure may outweigh the potential benefits of success in this case.

This work has also implications for theories of authoritarian resilience. Lacking an electoral mandate, authoritarian regimes like China are widely believed to survive in large part because of their "performance legitimacy"—their ability to deliver on important governance dimensions, including not just growth and rising standards of living, but also social stability and national unity, as an important source of regime support (Huntington 1991, Zhao 2009, Zhu 2011, Yang and Zhao 2014, Holbig and Gilley 2010). Our research highlights that it is no longer just the Party's performance in the domestic realm

that matters; performance on the international economic stage may increasingly shape citizen assessments of government performance in China.

Finally, our evidence adds to an emerging literature on the relationship between international economic engagement and domestic government support. This literature reveals that negative international economic shocks reduce support for incumbent parties in developed democracies (Autor et al. 2020; Broz, Frieden, and Weymouth 2021; Colantone and Stanig 2018; Hays et al. 2019; Kim and Margalit 2021; Margalit 2011). Our evidence from China shows that international economic policies also shape citizen support for incumbent governments in autocratic developing countries. We further extend the existing literature by showing that it is not just trade shocks, but a much wider set of international economic issues—from the degree of outward investment and the establishment of multilateral financial institutions to foreign aid—that influence evaluations of the incumbent.³

II. The Effect of Global Economic Expansion on Government Support

Argument and Testable Hypotheses

Our main argument is that governments who successfully expand their country's global economic influence are likely to realize domestic political benefits. The attainment of global economic leadership improves citizens' evaluation of their government. Conversely, when increasingly powerful states attempt but fail to enhance their country's global economic standing, the central government is likely to see their popularity decline. We theorize that there are two channels linking international economic initiatives and domestic government support, one based on economic considerations and the other premised on identity and status.

Citizens' optimism about the country's economic prospects may rise when their country expands its global economic influence. Individuals are likely to view their country as an emerging global economic leader when it creates new multilateral financial institutions and when it becomes the provider of aid, rather than a recipient of it. Citizens might interpret these outcomes as a signal that their country's long-term economic opportunities have improved. This, in turn, may lead them to expect higher rates of future economic growth as well as enhanced individual prospects. Conversely, failed efforts to expand economic influence might worsen citizen evaluations of both China's future economic prospects and their individual prospective welfare. Put differently, a country's rising or declining global economic ties might influence citizens' prospective economic evaluations. The literature on economic voting has demonstrated that individuals' prospective economic evaluations influences their support for incumbent governments, both in electoral democracies (e.g., Alt et al. 2016; MacKuen et al. 1992; Michelitch et al. 2012; Singer and Carlin 2013) and in authoritarian regimes (Chen et al. 1997; Ou-Yang and Zhou 2019; Wilking and Zhang 2013). Thus, expanding international

³ While most of the existing literature has focused on trade, other studies have considered migration shocks (Hangartner et al. 2019) and exchange rate shocks (Ahlquist et al. 2020; Schiumeri and Steinberg 2020). We are not aware of any previous studies linking government support to international investment, development banking, or the provision of foreign aid.

economic ties might influence support for the incumbent government through its influence on citizens' assessments of future economic performance.

Alternatively, playing a leadership role in the global economy might affect government support by strengthening citizens' sense of national pride. According to social identity theory, individuals care about the status of their group relative to other groups (Lin and Katada 2020; Gruffydd-Jones 2019; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Both elites and mass publics want their nation to be viewed positively in the world (Wood 2013, 391). The drive for national prestige, which can influence a state's willingness to expand its international economic influence (Cohen 2012, 19), has "profound effects on domestic politics" (Breiner 2004, 290). Playing a leadership role in international economic affairs may improve citizens' beliefs about their country's social status on the world stage. Since the central government is likely to be viewed as responsible for these status improvements, this should boost public support for the government. In contrast, failure may lead citizens to think that China's international status and prestige has been hurt, and that their country's standing in the world lags behind its potential. This may lead to a sense of injury in their national pride, and consequently weaken citizen support for the government.

For these reasons, we anticipate that rising powers that successfully expand their role in the global economy are likely to see their popularity increase domestically. These shifts in mass political attitudes depend on the public's awareness of their country's influence over global economic affairs. In other words, in order for a country's actual international economic role to influence mass political attitudes, citizens must possess some information about this issue. To test our argument, we therefore examine whether information that citizens have about their country's global economic expansion influences support for the central government. Our argument implies the following two testable hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Information suggesting that the country has successfully expanded its influence in the global economy increases public support for the central government.

Hypothesis 1b: Information suggesting that the country has failed in its efforts to expand its influence in the global economy reduces public support for the central government.

Hypothesis 2a: Information about global economic expansion influences public support for the central government because it changes individuals' prospective economic evaluations.

Hypothesis 2b: Information about global economic expansion influences public support for the central government because it changes individuals' level of national pride.

Applying the Argument to the Case of China

Our empirical analysis focuses on the most important rising power today: China. Consistent with the expectations of theories of rising powers (e.g. Gilpin 1987, 70; 187; Gilpin and Gilpin 2001, 101, 130), China's government in the 21st century has expended

considerable effort to try to expand its international economic presence and raise its status in the global arena. In his speech at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, President Xi Jinping not only emphasized that China was a “great nation” that would seek to build a “new type of international relations” on the world stage, he also praised China’s recent achievements in international economic affairs, noting a “rise in China’s international influence, ability to inspire, and power to shape; ... (as well as its) great new contributions to global peace and development.” China’s achievements, Xi asserted, “offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence” (Xi 2017).

While the list of examples illustrating China’s expanding international economic influence is long, we focus on three important components: the BRI, the AIIB and COVID-19 vaccine aid. We focus on these initiatives for several reasons. First, they cover a wide range of issue-areas, from trade, investment and multilateral financing to foreign assistance, thus capturing a large share of the breadth of China’s efforts. Second, for each of these issues, claims of both successful expansion and failure are plausible. In each case, it is possible to highlight some facts indicating that China’s international economic footprint has grown and other facts suggesting that China’s efforts at expansion have not succeeded, which makes these suitable contexts for testing our hypotheses. Third, these are useful cases for testing the proposed causal mechanisms because the Chinese media repeatedly touts both the economic and symbolic benefits of these initiatives. Thus, the success or failure of these initiatives could plausibly impact individuals’ prospective economic evaluations as well as their sense of national pride.

The first instance of economic expansion that we consider is China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), first announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013 on successive official visits to Indonesia and Kazakhstan and subsequently elevated to a high-level national priority incorporated into the CCP Constitution (Xinhua 2017). A sprawling initiative, the BRI aims to better connect China’s economy to over 100 countries in Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe through trade and investment agreements (especially in the transportation, shipping, and energy sectors). Since its launch, China has signed BRI-related memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with nearly 140 countries and 30 international organizations.⁴ More than 60 countries have either signed up for investment projects or signaled their interest in doing so (Chatzky and McBride 2020). The chief China economist at American investment bank Morgan Stanley has projected that the BRI’s total investments could add up to a staggering \$1.3 trillion by 2027 (Morgan Stanley 2018). However, as the BRI’s profile has grown globally, so too have questions about the ambitious program. One of the most prominent criticisms of the BRI is that it often funds so-called “white elephant” projects that fail to generate their promised returns (Shepard 2020). Others warn that the initiative saddles developing countries with unsustainable debts which Beijing could use as leverage in its diplomatic relations with borrowers (Gerstel 2018). Amid such concerns, several countries—including Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sierra Leone—have scaled back or even canceled planned BRI projects, somewhat dulling the initiative’s shine (Chaudhury 2018; Chaudran 2019).

⁴ For a list of participating countries and IOs as of 2019, see https://web.archive.loc.gov/all/20190208025452/https://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/info/iList.jsp?tm_id=126&cat_id=10122&info_id=77298 (Accessed 8/24/2020).

The Chinese government has portrayed the BRI as an instrument for economic gain as well as one that enhances the country's international prestige. As an example of the former, China's State Council has noted that the BRI helps China build a "new pattern of all-round opening up to the outside world, promote economic transformation and upgrading, thereby becoming a new engine of economic development."⁵ The *People's Daily* has also noted that the BRI "has opened up new spaces for global economic growth, built a new platform for international trade and investment, and expanded new practices for improving global economic governance."⁶ At the same time, national pride plays a notable role in media coverage of the BRI. State Council has noted that "the proposal and establishment of the 'Belt and Road' can not only reproduce the confidence and posture of the Silk Road but also arouse national self-confidence, self-esteem, and national pride."⁷ *Xinhua* has described the BRI in similarly nationalistic terms, noting that with the BRI, "China's overall national strength continues to grow, and its international status has been greatly improved."⁸

Founded in 2016, the AIIB is the first China-led multilateral development bank that boasts 103 member states (with another 21 prospective members).⁹ Headquartered in Beijing, and launched amidst some skepticism as well as outright opposition from the United States, China successfully courted many of America's closest partners to join as members, including Australia, Germany, South Korea, and the United Kingdom (Perlez 2015). The bank's \$100 billion in lendable resources are sizeable, and nearly rival other established multilateral development banks including the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. As of 2020, the AIIB has approved over 92 projects in at least 26 countries, including several aimed at helping developing countries cope with the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁰ Despite these genuine successes, the AIIB has failed to lend as much as it initially projected (Babones 2018). Moreover, it has failed to gain the approval of the United States or Japan. While it is viewed by some as a professional and status-quo institution that adheres to the lending principles established by other multilateral banks (Stephen and Skidmore 2019), analysts have also questioned whether the institution might serve as a potential vehicle for China to exert greater foreign policy influence (Wilson 2017) or alter the existing norms of the international system (Ikenberry and Lim 2017).

Media discussion of the AIIB likewise emphasizes a mixture of economic and status-related benefits. The *People's Daily* has highlighted how the AIIB serves Chinese economic interests, observing that the institution will improve the efficiency and rate of return of China's foreign exchange reserves, support the export of Chinese goods by promoting the economic development of other countries, open up the international market for the excess production capacity of China's manufacturing and construction industries, and promote the internationalization of the RMB.¹¹ At the same time, the Propaganda Department has put out articles highlighting that the AIIB reflects the growing strength of the Chinese nation (and the decline of the United States), that it

⁵ <http://www.scio.gov.cn/31773/35507/35510/35524/Document/1527952/1527952.htm>

⁶ <http://ydyf.people.com.cn/n1/2019/1223/c411837-31518195.html>

⁷ <http://www.scio.gov.cn/m/zhzc/10/Document/1436236/1436236.htm>

⁸ http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/70zn/2019-10/06/c_1125073613.htm

⁹ For a full list of AIIB members and prospective members, see <https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/governance/members-of-bank/index.html> (Accessed 8/24/2020).

¹⁰ For a summary of AIIB projects, see <https://www.aiib.org/en/projects/summary/index.html> (Accessed 8/24/2020).

¹¹ <http://finance.people.com.cn/bank/n/2015/0504/c202331-26944723.html>

reflects the “extensive and profound” Chinese civilization and is a part of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”¹²

China’s provision of its COVID-19 vaccines to developing countries has become a major component of its foreign aid since early 2021. By February 2021, China had pledged to provide vaccines to 53 countries,¹³ and by August that year had become the world’s largest exporter of COVID-19 vaccines.¹⁴ The vaccines, which meet the threshold of efficacy set by the World Health Organization, provided much-needed assistance to many countries at a time of global shortage. The vaccine shortage was particularly acute in the earlier half of 2021 when other vaccines (such as the Pfizer and Moderna shots) were being reserved for use in developed nations (Parkinson, Deng and Lin 2021, Mandhana and Hua 2021). However, China’s global provision of vaccine aid has met with mixed results. Not only were the efficacy rates of the Chinese vaccines far lower than those produced by the United States and Europe, a lack of information regarding the clinical trial results for the Chinese vaccines has undermined public trust in these vaccines in receiving nations. An international poll fielded in early 2021 found that people tended to be less trusting of vaccines from China (Kelland 2021), and some people interviewed by news media have said that they would refuse to take Chinese-made vaccines (Marlow, Mangi and Lindberg 2021).

China’s Covid-19 vaccine aid has also been portrayed in the media as not just having positive economic effects but also symbolizing the strength of China on the international stage. For example, one media article covering the arrival of Chinese vaccines in Thailand pointed out that “China’s COVID-19 vaccine will help Thailand’s tourism industry and economic recovery.”¹⁵ The *Global Times* also portrays China’s vaccine aid as playing an important role in aiding the economic recovery of developing nations.¹⁶ At the same time, articles, such as one in the *China Daily*, frame China’s vaccine aid in nationalistic terms by noting that China has been “hailed” globally for its overseas vaccine assistance and praised as a “reliable friend” by developing country leaders, and also by pointing out that China’s vaccine aid exceeds that of the United States and European Union.¹⁷ Given that media coverage of all three international initiatives discuss China’s efforts in both economic and nationalistic terms, it is not clear which mechanism will be more influential in shaping the responses of Chinese citizens.

In sum, the BRI, the AIIB and China’s vaccine aid are three major economic initiatives that reflect China’s expanding activism and influence in international economic affairs. Within each of these initiatives, there are some markers of success that the government can point to. However, none of these initiatives are unambiguous examples of successful expansion, and there are facets in each area that indicate underperformance instead of progress. Our argument implies that informing Chinese citizens about their country’s achievements in RMB internationalization, the BRI and AIIB will increase their support for the central government. On the other hand, informing them about the ways in which these programs have faltered should reduce individuals’ support for China’s Communist Party. Information about the success or failure of these

¹² <https://www.lygxc.gov.cn/?p=5106>

¹³ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-02/08/c_139730673.htm

¹⁴ <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-business-health-china-coronavirus-pandemic-7b3a7e0f5949b6976d4cf7f69bba71d0>

¹⁵ <http://www.bjnews.com.cn/detail/161709179815168.html>

¹⁶ <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/43y6c54IHnh>

¹⁷ <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202108/05/WS610b2a75a310efa1bd666b37.html>

initiatives is expected to influence government support through two channels—by changing individuals’ prospective economic evaluations and by altering their sense of national pride.

III. Research Design

We fielded three original internet-based survey experiments to test whether China’s global economic expansion influences support for China’s central government. Each experiment focused on a different component of China’s external economic strategy. Our first survey, fielded in April 2019, focused on the Belt and Road Initiative. In July 2019, we conducted an experiment on the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank. The third experiment, which we fielded in April 2021, examined vaccine aid. Surveying public opinion on a range of different economic issues, each of which has some distinct characteristics, helps us provide a broader and more generalizable understanding of the Chinese public’s reaction to global economic expansion.

While each survey focused on a different economic initiative, all three experiments followed an analogous format. At the start of the experiment, respondents were randomly assigned into one of three experimental conditions: a control group that received no information about the success or failure of the specific initiative; a “successful expansion treatment” that provided respondents with some factual information about the successful expansion in this issue-area; or a “failed expansion treatment,” where respondents received information suggesting that despite its efforts, China remains a laggard in this area. While the two treatment groups received different pieces of information, which aimed to produce opposite conclusions about the extent of global economic expansion, all information conveyed in the treatments was accurate. Moreover, we sought to keep the two treatments of similar word length and priming strength within each experiment. Table 1 provides the complete text for these treatments across the three experiments.

After reading this information, respondents were asked a question about whether they think that China’s government should continue to expand its global economic role in this issue-area (as shown in Table 1). The main purpose of this question was misdirection—to create the appearance that foreign economic policy was our main question of interest, and disguise our true intention of examining how the treatments influenced attitudes about the central government. That said, responses to this question also serve several secondary purposes: it is useful to know whether different facets of global economic expansion are popular; and these questions enable us to conduct manipulation checks to ensure that our treatments had the anticipated effect on perceptions of these issues.

In each experiment, respondents were offered an 11-point sliding scale asking them to rate their level of agreement or disagreement that the government should continue to support these initiatives. We code these variables so that higher values indicate stronger support for global economic expansion.

Table 1: Summary of Experimental Treatments

| | Control Group | Successful Expansion | Failed Expansion |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| BRI (Apr. 2019) | In 2013, the Chinese government launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Do you agree that the government should continue to support BRI? | In 2013, the Chinese government launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Since its launch, it has attracted global attention and 152 countries have joined. BRI projects have led to the successful building of dams, ports, and railways in these countries and increased connectivity among participants. Do you agree that the government should continue to support BRI? | In 2013, the Chinese government launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to build dams, ports, and railways in participating countries. Some prominent countries have decided to stay out of the BRI while others that initially joined subsequently decided to cancel their BRI projects. Do you agree that the government should continue to support BRI? |
| AIIB (Jul. 2019) | In 2014, the Chinese government launched the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, which supports the building of infrastructure throughout Asia. Do you agree that the government should continue to support the AIIB? | In 2014, the Chinese government launched the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, which supports the building of infrastructure throughout Asia. The AIIB has attracted global praise and over 70 countries have joined it. The number of projects financed by AIIB has grown rapidly, with more than 40 financed in over a dozen countries. Do you agree that the government should continue to support the AIIB? | In 2014, the Chinese government launched the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, which supports the building of infrastructure throughout Asia. The AIIB has drawn international criticism and several influential foreign countries have declined to join it. The number of projects financed by the AIIB is far below what was initially expected. Do you agree that the government should continue to support the AIIB? |
| Vaccine Aid (Apr. 2021) | The Chinese government has been offering Chinese-made vaccines as aid to other countries. Do you agree that China should continue providing vaccine aid to other countries? | The Chinese government has been offering Chinese-made vaccines as aid to other countries. China's vaccine trials have met international standards and have efficacy levels that meet the World Health Organization's effectiveness criteria. The vaccines are in high demand and so far 53 developing countries are receiving vaccine aid. Do you agree that China should continue providing vaccine aid to other countries? | The Chinese government has been offering Chinese-made vaccines as aid to other countries. However, detailed information about the vaccine trials has been lacking. Surveys show that this has reduced confidence in recipient countries that these vaccines are effective. Do you agree that China should continue providing vaccine aid to other countries? |

After completing the question about foreign economic policy, respondents proceeded to a new page of the survey, which included several questions about China's government and economy. The first question always asked about approval of China's central government, and this question serves as our dependent variable. Specifically, respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "I am very satisfied with the performance of China's central government." Those surveys offered an 11-point sliding scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." We code this variable so that higher values indicate stronger government support. The remaining questions, whose order was randomized, asked respondents about their attitudes towards the economy and national pride. These questions serve as tests for our proposed causal mechanisms.

The surveys were completed online using convenience samples. Subjects were recruited using a Chinese crowd-sourcing service that operates in similar fashion to Amazon's Mechanical Turk. This is a cost-effective method that enabled us to reach around 2000 respondents or more per survey. While the sample skews younger and has a higher education profile than the average citizen, these "netizens" represent a politically salient segment of the Chinese population. This group makes up the very sub-population that online public opinion monitors target in their work for China's government (Denyer 2013). Additionally, a recent study on Internet recruitment in China offers reassurance on the representativeness of this sample, as it finds that online convenience samples produce attitude estimates that are highly consistent with national probability samples (Li, Shi, and Zhu 2018).

One challenge with using online samples is that paid respondents may not pay sufficient attention to the questions (Harden et al. 2019). To mitigate this concern, we drop all subjects who finished the survey in three minutes or less.¹⁸ Respondents that completed the survey so quickly were likely not paying full attention to the questions. Importantly, however, as we show in Appendix A, the results are similar if we include all observations in our analyses and if we use a lower or higher threshold for excluding observations.

IV. Main Findings

Support for Global Economic Expansion

As a first step in our analyses, we examine support for global economic expansion. Individuals should be more supportive of continuing policies that have achieved their objectives and less likely to support policies portrayed as failures. Thus, support for global economic engagement should be highest in the successful expansion treatment group and lowest in the failed expansion treatment group. The results, which are presented in Table 2, support this expectation.

¹⁸ In doing so, we follow previous studies that utilized online survey experiments in China (Gueorguiev et al. 2020; Steinberg et al. 2020). This approach closely matches Harden et al.'s (2019) recommendation to drop observations that do not spend sufficient time reading the experimental vignette itself. Since the questions in our experiments can be read fairly quickly even by attentive respondents, it is more appropriate given our research design to focus on the total time respondents take to complete the survey.

Table 2 presents ordinary least-squares (OLS) estimates of the effect of each treatment on support for global economic expansion. The control group serves as the baseline in these models. We present two sets of models: the odd-numbered columns present models with no control variables; the even-numbered columns show results from models that include some demographic covariates, namely a respondent's age, income level, educational attainment, membership in the CCP, gender, and hukou status. (For more details on these demographic controls, as well as complete regression output, see Appendix B).

The first key finding from the table is that all three forms of global economic expansion receive enthusiastic support, at least in the sample. The mean level of support for the BRI is 8.6 on a zero-to-ten scale among those in the control group (as given by the constant term in column 1). The AIIB and vaccine aid are also popular, though less so than the BRI: the mean level of support for AIIB and vaccine aid are 7.3 and 7.6, respectively, among control-group respondents.

Table 2: Support for Global Economic Expansion

| | BRI | | AIIB | | Vaccine Aid | |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Successful Expansion | 0.22*** [0.08] | 0.11 [0.09] | -0.04 [0.09] | -0.06 [0.09] | 0.18* [0.09] | 0.19** [0.09] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.67*** [0.08] | -0.68*** [0.09] | -0.68*** [0.09] | -0.70*** [0.09] | -0.71*** [0.09] | -0.72*** [0.09] |
| Constant | 8.64*** [0.06] | 7.94*** [0.22] | 7.26*** [0.06] | 7.78*** [0.21] | 7.61*** [0.07] | 7.08*** [0.22] |
| Controls | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y |
| N | 2,774 | 2,148 | 3,144 | 3,144 | 2,706 | 2,683 |

Note: Cell entries are OLS estimates of average treatment effects, with standard errors in brackets. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Controls are age, education, income, CCP membership, hukou status, and gender.

The experimental treatments have the expected effects on attitudes on global economic expansion. In two of three cases (BRI, vaccine aid), average support for global economic expansion is significantly higher in the successful expansion treatment compared to the control in at least one model. The estimated effect of the successful expansion treatment is close to zero in the AIIB experiment. The failed expansion treatment has a statistically significant negative effect on support for global economic expansion in all models.

While both treatments appear to influence support for these initiatives, the failed expansion treatment has a larger effect than the successful expansion treatment in all three experiments. The failed expansion treatment consistently reduces support by about 0.7 points. The effect of the successful expansion treatment is more modest, with an effect size no larger than 0.2. The weaker effects of the successful expansion treatments may reflect the fact that these initiatives regularly receive prominent and highly positive coverage in official Chinese media. Given such favorable coverage, it is likely that the successful expansion treatments were consistent with our survey respondents' priors about these initiatives, and this helps explain why the treatments had

limited effect on public opinion. Relatedly, high baseline levels of support may limit the ability of any new information to further boost support for these initiatives. Overall, the data indicate that there is strong enthusiasm amongst the Chinese public for global economic expansion, though information portraying these initiatives as failing to achieve their aims tempers that enthusiasm.

Support for China's Central Government

We now turn to our main question of interest: the effect of our treatments on support for China's central government. The main results are presented in Table 3. As with the previous set of results, we present results with and without demographic controls. The first finding of note is that baseline levels of government support are quite high: an average of about eight on a zero-to-ten scale, though there is some slight variation across surveys. This is consistent with other survey-based research on China, which also finds strong levels of support for the CCP, particularly at the central-government level (Tang 2016; Cunningham, Saich and Turiel 2020; Dickson et al. 2017; Huang 2018).

More importantly, all three experiments provide some support for our main argument. The failed expansion treatment has a remarkably consistent effect on support for China's central government. Across the three experiments, information on policy failure reduces satisfaction with the central government by around 0.2 points. These effects are not especially large, but given that most people have strong priors on this issue, our experimental treatments are quite subtle, and the treatments and outcome questions are on separate survey pages, it would be unrealistic to expect very strong treatments effects. The effect of the failed expansion treatment is statistically significant in all three experiments, albeit only at the 90% confidence level in the AIIB experiment. In sum, the information suggesting that China's efforts to expand its global economic leadership role have failed leads to a modest reduction in support for the country's central government.

Table 3: Support for China's Central Government

| | BRI | | AIIB | | Vaccine Aid | |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Successful Expansion | 0.02 [0.08] | -0.08 [0.09] | -0.08 [0.09] | -0.11 [0.09] | -0.12 [0.08] | -0.11 [0.08] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.24*** [0.08] | -0.22** [0.09] | -0.16* [0.09] | -0.17* [0.09] | -0.16** [0.08] | -0.16** [0.08] |
| Constant | 8.05*** [0.06] | 8.33*** [0.22] | 7.69*** [0.06] | 7.76*** [0.20] | 8.50*** [0.06] | 8.49*** [0.18] |
| Controls | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y |
| N | 2,773 | 2,148 | 3,138 | 3,138 | 2,920 | 2,899 |

Note: Cell entries are OLS estimates of average treatment effects, with standard errors in brackets. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Controls are age, education, income, CCP membership, hukou status, and gender.

The top row of Table 3 shows that the successful expansion treatment does not have much impact on central-government support. In all cases, the effects are smaller in absolute size than those of the failed expansion treatment, and they are not statistically significant in any case. In most cases, the effect of this treatment is of the “incorrect,” negative, sign. These weak, and possibly negative, effects may be to the fact that support for China’s government is already high, and therefore difficult to further increase, as well as the fact that the information in these treatments are consistent with subjects’ priors. Additionally, it is possible that some might interpret the information about successful expansion as a form of propaganda, which can create a backlash effect that worsens citizens’ opinions of the regime (Huang 2018).

Overall, the results across three experiments, conducted across multiple issue-areas and years, largely support our argument that evaluations of China’s government are affected by the country’s initiatives on the global stage. In particular, failed attempts to expand the country’s international economic presence can reduce mass public support for the government.

Addressing Potential Threats to Validity

Next, we address two potential threats to inference. The first possible concern is that our measure of government support is not valid due to social desirability bias. This is a potentially serious issue because citizens in authoritarian regimes such as China may be reluctant to respond sincerely, and they may report strong support for China’s central government even if this is not their true opinion. Several features of our survey are likely to mitigate the risk of social desirability bias. Online surveys, which are relatively more anonymous, reduce the degree of social desirability biases compared to in-person surveys (e.g., Heerwegh 2009). Our use of an ordinal scale for this question, which offered subjects multiple response categories, should reduce the extent to which respondents would believe that there is only one politically correct answer.¹⁹ Moreover, as we show in Table C1 in the appendix, response rates to our question about support for the central government are very high in all three surveys. If “political desirability bias” were a problem, and people viewed this question as overly sensitive, we would expect high non-response rates to our government support measure (Jiang and Yang 2016; Robinson and Tannenbergh 2019). It would also be problematic if our treatments caused an increase in the rate of preference falsification. But Table B1 also shows that response rates are uniformly high across treatment conditions. In short, universally high response rates across surveys and experimental conditions help alleviate concerns about political desirability bias.

Another potential concern is that the netizens in our sample respond differently to our treatments than other segments of the population. Without data from other groups, it is impossible to fully rule out this possibility. However, we can help mitigate concerns over this issue with the available samples by examining whether the observable dimensions in which our sample differs from the rest of the population moderate how

¹⁹ By contrast, previous evidence that Chinese survey respondents exaggerate their support for the government is based on either face-to-face surveys (Jiang and Yang 2016) or online surveys that required respondents to answer binary questions about whether they do or do not trust the central government (Li et al. 2018; Robinson and Tannenbergh 2019). Other studies, however, find that Chinese survey respondents do indeed provide sincere answers about their support for the government (Lei and Lu 2017; Stockmann et al. 2018; Tang 2016).

subjects respond to our treatment effects. If responses to our treatments are similar across age, education and income profiles within our sample, this would provide fairly strong evidence that our main findings are likely representative of the broader population. We therefore run a series of estimations where interaction terms between our treatments and age, income, and education are added to our regressions. Appendix D presents the results of these models. There is very little evidence that these demographic variables moderate individuals' responses to our survey. We also examined whether other pre-treatment covariates, such as CCP membership, gender, and urban household registration moderate the effects of our treatments, and find little heterogeneity along these dimensions either. This increases our confidence that our findings are likely to generalize to the broader Chinese population.

V. Causal Mechanisms

This section examines the channels through which global economic expansion influences support for the central government. We focus on testing the role of identity-based concerns or economic considerations in driving the link between foreign economic expansion and central-government support. In all three experiments, following the question about central government support that serves as our dependent variable, we included questions that tap into these mechanisms. To measure national pride, respondents were asked how much they agree with the following statement: "I would rather be a citizen of China than of any other country in the world."²⁰ We measure economic perceptions based on the degree to which respondents agreed or disagreed that "the economic situation in China will improve over the next five years."²¹ The questions about nationalism and economic prospects are both 11-point scales where higher values indicate more positive assessments.

Our results focus on the effect of the failed expansion treatment because this was the treatment that consistently impacted support for the central government. We use causal mediation analysis to test whether nationalism and prospective economic evaluations are important causal channels through which the failed expansion treatment influences central-government support.²²

Causal mediation analysis decomposes the "total effect," or average treatment effect, into two components. The first component, the "mediation effect," refers to the effect that is accounted for by the mediator variable, which is either national pride or economic evaluations in this analysis. A mediation effect exists when the treatment influences the mediator and the mediator in turn influences the outcome. Mediation

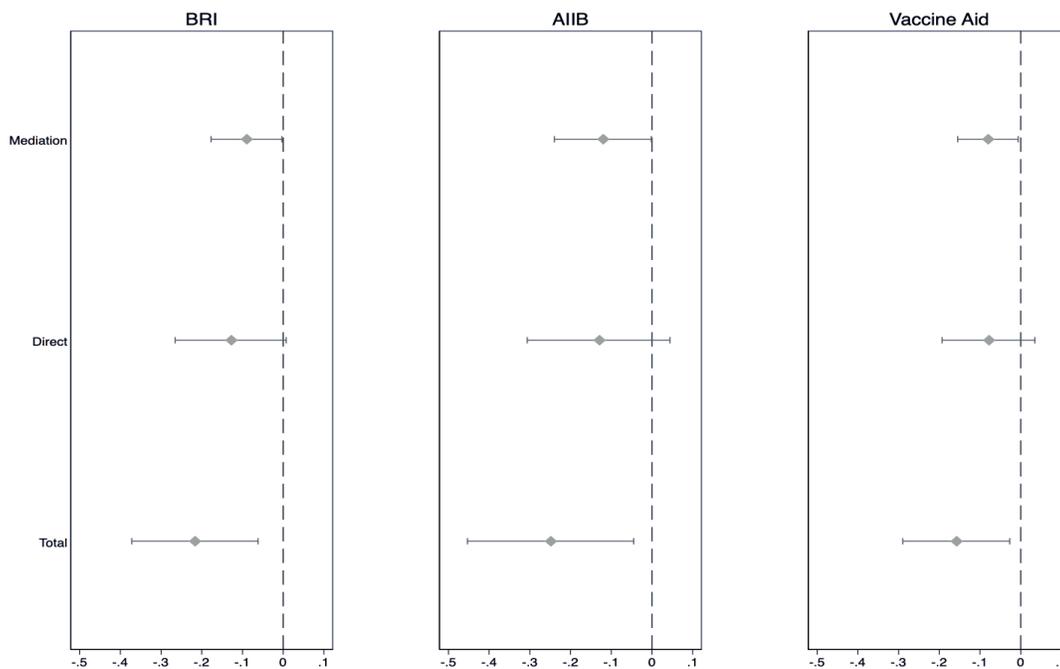
²⁰ This question has been used to measure nationalism in previous research on Chinese public opinion (e.g., Johnston 2017) and in studies examining public opinion towards foreign-economic policy issues in other countries (e.g., Mansfield and Mutz 2009; Nelson and Steinberg 2018).

²¹ This question is very similar to the standard measure of (prospective, sociotropic) economic evaluations. The main difference is that previous surveys typically ask about economic changes over the next year while we ask about the next five years. We do so because changes in China's global economic position are a long-term change that is unlikely to influence peoples' views about China's short-term economic well-being, but could plausibly impact perceptions of economic performance over this longer term.

²² Since the causal effect of the successful expansion treatment on central government support is not distinguishable from zero, it is less useful to study the causal mechanisms linking this treatment to the outcome.

effects are quantified as the product of two coefficients: (1) the estimated effect of the treatment on the mediator; and (2) the estimated effect of the mediator on the outcome. The “direct effect” is the remaining effect, consisting of all other potential channels through which the failed expansion treatment influences central-government support. The direct effect is measured as the effect of the treatment on the outcome, after controlling for the mediator. To estimate the causal mediation effects, we include the same set of pre-treatment covariates as in the earlier models.²³

Figure 1: Testing the National Identity Mechanism



Note: Figure displays the point estimates of the average causal mediation effect of national pride together with the direct and total effects for the failed expansion treatment, with 95% confidence intervals. Estimation is based on Hicks and Tingley (2011).

Figure 1 presents the main results from our tests of the national identity mechanism. For each experiment, the figure plots three quantities, along with the 95% confidence intervals for those quantities: (1) the total effect of the failed expansion treatment on support for the central government; (2) the mediation effect of the failed expansion treatment, which is the share of the total effect that is accounted for by the national pride mediator; and (3) the direct effect, which is the share of the total effect that is driven by channels other than national pride.²⁴ Consistent with the findings in Table 3,

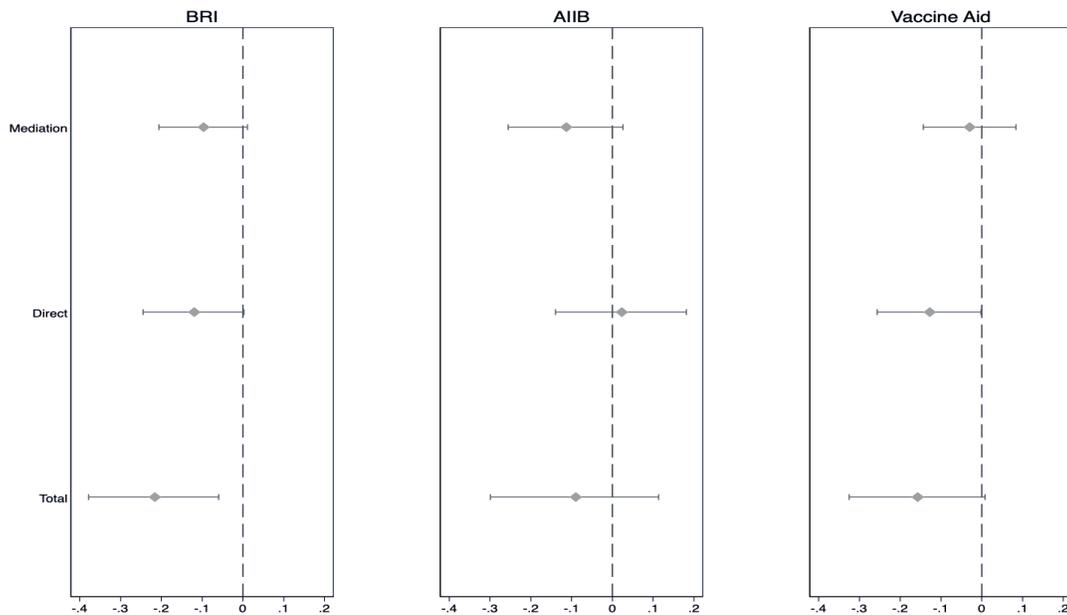
²³ Failure to control for potential confounders could bias our estimates of the effect of the mediator on the outcome variable, and in turn bias the estimated mediation and direct effects (Imai et al. 2011, 770-72). For this reason, all our mediation models include pre-treatment covariates.

²⁴ Appendix E presents the full regression results from which the estimates of the mediation and direct effects are based.

the total effect of the failed expansion treatment is negative and statistically significant in all three experiments. Figure 1 also shows that, in all three experiments, the mediation effect is negative and statistically significant at the 95% level. The magnitude of the mediation effect is substantial as well, ranging between 40% and 50% of the total effect. These results indicate that a loss of national pride is one important channel through which failed global economic expansion reduces support for China's central government.

Next, we test the economic evaluation channel. The main results, presented in Figure 2, provide more limited support for this mechanism. In the BRI and AIIB experiments, economic evaluations has a similarly sized mediation effects as national pride. However, the mediation effect of economic evaluations is very small in the vaccine aid experiment. Furthermore, the economic assessment variable is not a statistically significant mediator in any of the three experiments.²⁵ We therefore fail to find much evidence that the effect of global economic expansion on government satisfaction is driven by individuals' economic evaluations.

Figure 2: Testing the Economic Evaluation Mechanism



Note: Figure displays the point estimates of the average causal mediation effect of personal economic evaluations together with the direct and total effects for the failed expansion treatment, with 95% confidence intervals. Estimation is based on Hicks and Tingley (2011).

The main finding of this section thus far is that national pride mediates the relationship between global economic expansion and support for the central government. The identification of causal mediation effects relies on a “sequential ignorability” assumption, which requires that there are no pre-treatment variables that confound either the relationship between the treatment and the mediator or the

²⁵ Figure 2 shows that the 95% confidence interval always includes zero. This is also the case for the 90% confidence interval.

relationship between the mediator and the outcome variable (Imai et al. 2011). Since this assumption cannot be directly tested, we follow the suggestion of Imai et al. (2011) to use sensitivity analysis to assess how robust our mediation results are to possible violations of this assumption. Table E3 in the Appendix presents the main results of the sensitivity analysis, which indicate that a very substantial level of pre-treatment confounding would be required to overturn our finding that nationalism is an important mediator. In sum, our results provide robust support for the hypothesis that global economic leadership influences central-government support through a national identity channel.

VI. Conclusion

China's outward economic expansion in recent years has raised immense public and scholarly attention. A thriving body of scholarship examines the impact of China's expanding economic footprint on great power relations and on the shape and stability of the liberal international order. Important work has also unpacked the potential domestic motives and global grand strategy driving China's overseas ambitions. By contrast, the question of how these various economic initiatives affect domestic public opinion towards the government has been overlooked. The evidence presented in this paper underscores that a government's external economic engagements has a meaningful impact on public satisfaction with the incumbent party. We find that failure to expand China's global economic leadership role generates sentiments of dissatisfaction with the central government. Our results also suggest that this effect is partly driven by the fact that failed expansion reduces individuals' sense of national pride

These findings add a new dimension to scholarship on Chinese economic statecraft, by highlighting the repercussions that overseas economic expansion can have on CCP support. On the one hand, the CCP stands to reap a domestic political dividend from successfully extending China's economic imprint overseas. At the same time, the risks of failure are quite real – poor results outside of China's borders lead citizens to downgrade their assessments of the ruling party, partly because information about failure diminishes feelings of pride in the nation. These concerns should not be underestimated, as criticisms over the standards, due diligence and financial sustainability of BRI projects have grown in recent years (Ng 2019). While much analysis has focused on how dissatisfaction with these projects might damage China's foreign relations with partner countries, our research indicates that poor performance overseas is also likely to undermine the public's support for the CCP at home.

This paper further extends the scope of literature on authoritarian performance legitimacy beyond the domestic realm, contributing an international dimension to existing understandings of authoritarian resilience. Our study shows that citizen support for the CCP rests not just on the party's ability to deliver demonstrable results in domestic issues such as growth, public service provision and social stability, but also on whether or not it is able to exhibit competence in overseas economic ventures. As China's global economic footprint continues to expand, this international aspect of authoritarian performance legitimacy is also likely to grow in importance.

Finally, we contribute an important extension to research on negative economic shocks and support for incumbent parties in developed democracies. This literature has brought vital insights into the impact of economic shocks on domestic political support for incumbents. Our study examines the flip side of the coin – economic expansion in an authoritarian developing country – and finds that even under conditions of autocracy, citizen support for the incumbent party is affected by outward economic initiatives. Crucially, these findings suggest that domestic public opinion is impacted not just by trade flows (which has been the main focus of recent research), but also initiatives in the monetary and investment arenas, thereby opening up a potentially fruitful avenue for additional future research.

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Appendix A: Different Thresholds for Excluding Observations

Appendix A shows that our main findings are robust to using different thresholds for the inclusion or exclusion of observations. The results presented in the main text only include respondents that spent three-plus minutes on the survey. We did so to drop inattentive respondents. Table A1 shows the main results when we include all observations, when we use lower thresholds of two or 2.5 minutes, and when we use higher thresholds of 3.5 or 4 minutes. The measure of government support is the outcome variable in these tables. The results in these tables show that our findings do not hinge on this particular cutoff for including/excluding observations.

Column (1) shows the results for the BRI experiment, where the failed expansion treatment has similar effects irrespective of which threshold is used to exclude observations. The effects for the AIIB experiment are also similar to the main results in Table 3 in all cases. In the vaccine aid experiment, the effect of the failed expansion treatment is similar in magnitude to the main estimates in Table 3, but the estimates are often noisier, in several cases being significant only at the 90% confidence level and in one case falling short of statistical significance. However, the one case where the treatment effect is not statistically significant comes in the highest cutoff in the survey that had the shortest average response time (4 minute cutoff in vaccine aid experiment), so the sample is smaller than in all other cases. In one case as well, the successful expansion treatment has a negative and statistically significant effect.

Table A1: Alternative Thresholds

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| All Observations | BRI | AIIB | Vaccine Aid |
| Successful Expansion | 0.05 [0.08] | -0.08 [0.09] | -0.09 [0.08] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.18** [0.08] | -0.16* [0.09] | -0.13* [0.08] |
| Constant | 8.01*** [0.06] | 7.69*** [0.06] | 8.45*** [0.05] |
| N | 3,184 | 3,142 | 3,153 |
| 2 Minutes | (1) BRI | (2) AIIB | (3) Vaccine Aid |
| Successful Expansion | 0.05 [0.08] | -0.08 [0.09] | -0.10 [0.08] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.18*** [0.08] | -0.16* [0.09] | -0.14* [0.08] |
| Constant | 8.02** [0.06] | 7.69*** [0.06] | 8.45*** [0.05] |
| N | 2,966 | 3,142 | 3,112 |
| 2.5 Minutes | (1) BRI | (2) AIIB | (3) Vaccine Aid |
| Successful Expansion | 0.04 [0.08] | -0.08 [0.09] | -0.10 [0.08] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.22*** [0.08] | -0.16* [0.09] | -0.15* [0.08] |
| Constant | 8.03*** [0.06] | 7.69*** [0.06] | 8.47*** [0.05] |
| N | 2,865 | 3,142 | 3,047 |
| 3.5 Minutes | (1) BRI | (2) AIIB | (3) Vaccine Aid |
| Successful Expansion | 0.03 [0.09] | -0.08 [0.09] | -0.13* [0.08] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.22** [0.08] | -0.15* [0.09] | -0.17** [0.08] |
| Constant | 8.04** [0.06] | 7.69*** [0.06] | 8.50*** [0.06] |
| N | 2,657 | 3,131 | 2,692 |
| 4 Minutes | (1) BRI | (2) AIIB | (3) Vaccine Aid |
| Successful Expansion | 0.07 [0.09] | -0.08 [0.09] | -0.06 [0.08] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.21** [0.09] | -0.16* [0.09] | -0.10 [0.08] |
| Constant | 8.03*** [0.06] | 7.69*** [0.06] | 8.42*** [0.06] |
| N | 2,542 | 3,115 | 2,426 |

Note: Cell entries are OLS estimates of average treatment effects, with standard errors in brackets. * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.

Appendix B: Summary Statistics and Results for Demographic Control Variables

Tables B1-B3 list the categories for each of the pre-treatment control variables included in the analysis, along with data on the distribution of each of these variables.

Table B1: Summary Statistics for BRI Survey

| Variable | Freq. | Percent |
|-------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Income | | |
| <20k | 729 | 28.2 |
| 20-30k | 226 | 8.7 |
| 30-60k | 582 | 22.5 |
| 60-150k | 861 | 33.3 |
| >150k | 188 | 7.3 |
| CCP member | | |
| No | 1,710 | 79.6 |
| Yes | 438 | 20.4 |
| Female | | |
| No | 1,409 | 50.8 |
| Yes | 1,367 | 49.2 |
| Age | | |
| <25 years | 1,116 | 40.2 |
| 25 to 34 years | 1,295 | 50.3 |
| 35 to 44 years | 219 | 7.9 |
| >45 years | 46 | 1.7 |
| Education | | |
| Junior high or below | 83 | 3.2 |
| Secondary | 301 | 11.6 |
| Bachelor | 1,989 | 76.9 |
| Post-Graduate and above | 213 | 8.2 |
| Urban Hukou | | |
| No | 1,032 | 39.9 |
| Yes | 1,554 | 60.1 |

Table B2: Summary Statistics for AIIB Survey

| Variable | Freq. | Percent |
|-------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Income | | |
| <20k | 1,034 | 29.3 |
| 20-30k | 377 | 10.7 |
| 30-60k | 875 | 24.8 |
| 60-150k | 1,040 | 29.5 |
| >150k | 205 | 5.8 |
| CCP member | | |
| No | 2,901 | 82.2 |
| Yes | 630 | 17.8 |
| Female | | |
| No | 2,000 | 56.6 |
| Yes | 1,531 | 43.4 |
| Age | | |
| <25 years | 932 | 26.4 |
| 25 to 34 years | 1,206 | 34.2 |
| 35 to 44 years | 664 | 18.8 |
| >45 years | 729 | 20.7 |
| Education | | |
| Junior high or below | 445 | 12.6 |
| Secondary | 973 | 27.6 |
| Bachelor | 1,925 | 54.5 |
| Post-Graduate and above | 188 | 5.3 |
| Urban Hukou | | |
| No | 1,436 | 40.7 |
| Yes | 2,095 | 59.3 |

Table B3: Summary Statistics for Vaccine Aid Survey

| Variable | Freq. | Percent |
|-------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Income | | |
| <20k | 851 | 29.0 |
| 20-30k | 208 | 7.1 |
| 30-60k | 623 | 21.2 |
| 60-150k | 1,011 | 34.5 |
| >150k | 241 | 8.2 |
| CCP member | | |
| No | 2,416 | 83.3 |
| Yes | 483 | 16.7 |
| Female | | |
| No | 1,335 | 45.5 |
| Yes | 1,599 | 54.5 |
| Age | | |
| <25 years | 1,020 | 34.8 |
| 25 to 34 years | 1,216 | 41.5 |
| 35 to 44 years | 393 | 13.4 |
| >45 years | 305 | 10.4 |
| Education | | |
| Junior high or below | 208 | 7.1 |
| Secondary | 563 | 19.2 |
| Bachelor | 2,050 | 69.9 |
| Post-Graduate and above | 113 | 3.9 |
| Urban Hukou | | |
| No | 1,349 | 46.0 |
| Yes | 1,585 | 54.0 |

Table B4 presents the complete regression output for the models of support for global economic expansion that include control variables. Table 2 presents the coefficients for the experimental treatments; this table presents the coefficients on the controls as well. Several of the pre-treatment controls are statistically significant predictors of support for global economic expansion. CCP members and educated respondents tend to be more supportive of global economic expansion, while women express lower levels of support for global economic expansion.

Table B4: Support for Global Economic Expansion (Complete Results)

| | (1) BRI | (2) AIIB | (3) Vaccine Aid |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Successful Expansion | 0.105 [0.094] | -0.062 [0.089] | 0.189** [0.094] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.680*** [0.093] | -0.704*** [0.090] | -0.721*** [0.095] |
| CCP Member | 0.156 [0.097] | 0.356*** [0.099] | 0.226** [0.106] |
| Age | 0.032 [0.062] | -0.059 [0.043] | -0.096** [0.047] |
| Education | 0.273*** [0.070] | -0.069 [0.060] | 0.108* [0.064] |
| Income | 0.027 [0.032] | -0.009 [0.031] | 0.073** [0.032] |
| Urban Hukou | -0.056 [0.081] | -0.085 [0.080] | 0.084 [0.082] |
| Female | -0.328*** [0.077] | -0.413*** [0.081] | -0.174** [0.078] |
| Constant | 7.938*** [0.219] | 7.776*** [0.206] | 7.077*** [0.225] |
| Observations | 2,148 | 3,144 | 2,683 |
| R-squared | 0.056 | 0.036 | 0.046 |

Standard errors in brackets

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table B5 presents the complete regression output for the models of support for China's central government that include control variables. Table 3 presents the coefficients for the experimental treatments; this table presents the coefficients on the controls as well. CCP members express higher levels of support for China's central government, while women express lower levels of support.

Table B5: Support for China's Central Government (Complete Results)

| | (1) BRI | (2) AIIB | (3) Vaccine Aid |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Successful Expansion | -0.078 [0.093] | -0.108 [0.089] | -0.107 [0.077] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.217** [0.092] | -0.174** [0.089] | -0.158** [0.077] |
| CCP Member | 0.317*** [0.096] | 0.329*** [0.098] | 0.274*** [0.087] |
| Age | 0.025 [0.062] | 0.056 [0.042] | -0.017 [0.039] |
| Education | -0.004 [0.069] | -0.034 [0.059] | -0.069 [0.052] |
| Income | -0.018 [0.032] | 0.021 [0.031] | 0.014 [0.026] |
| Urban Hukou | -0.145* [0.080] | -0.126 [0.079] | -0.102 [0.067] |
| Female | -0.408*** [0.076] | -0.345*** [0.080] | -0.146** [0.064] |
| Constant | 8.335*** [0.217] | 7.761*** [0.204] | 8.486*** [0.183] |
| Observations | 2,148 | 3,138 | 2,899 |
| R-squared | 0.023 | 0.017 | 0.008 |

Standard errors in brackets

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Appendix C: Validation of Government Support Variable

Table C1 shows high response rates for the main government support variable in all surveys. (Response rates are defined here as the number of responses to the government support question divided by the total number of subjects that were still in the survey for the prior question.) A low response rate could indicate a degree of discomfort with answering the question on satisfaction with the central government. Across the three experiments, the response rate is slightly lower in the AIIB survey, but still, over 98% of subjects provided an answer to this question. Response rates do not differ across experimental conditions, suggesting that our treatments do not increase the perception that this question is a sensitive one.

Table C1: Response Rates

| | BRI | AIIB | Vaccine Aid |
|----------------------|--------|-------|-------------|
| Full Sample | 99.7% | 98.4% | 99.5% |
| Control | 99.8% | 98.3% | 99.4% |
| Successful Expansion | 99.9% | 98.0% | 99.6% |
| Failed Expansion | 100.0% | 98.8% | 99.6% |

Appendix D: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects

Appendix D examines whether a respondent's demographic attributes moderate the effects of our treatments on government support. To address this issue, we run a series of interaction models, where we include multiplicative interaction terms between the treatment variables and one demographic variable. We include all the demographic models included in our mediation models: age, education, income, membership in the Chinese Communist Party, urban household registration, and gender. Tables D1, D2, and D3 present the results for the BRI, AIIB, and vaccine aid experiments, respectively. Of the 36 interaction terms, only three are statistically significant at the 90% confidence level, and just one of them attains statistical significance at the 95% confidence level. Moreover, no moderator variable has the same significant effect more than once. Overall, the results suggest that responses to our treatments differ little across individuals.

Table D1: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects (BRI Experiment)

| | (1) Age | (2) Education | (3) Income | (4) CCP Member | (5) Urban Hukou | (6) Female |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Successful Expansion | -0.228 [0.224] | -0.319 [0.446] | -0.226 [0.198] | -0.047 [0.105] | -0.056 [0.134] | 0.071 [0.116] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.360 [0.223] | 0.266 [0.445] | -0.453** [0.198] | -0.218** [0.104] | -0.111 [0.136] | -0.219* [0.117] |
| Moderator | -0.056 [0.084] | 0.001 [0.105] | -0.053 [0.045] | 0.345** [0.166] | -0.125 [0.123] | -0.380*** [0.117] |
| SuccessXModerator | 0.146 [0.122] | 0.111 [0.151] | 0.083 [0.064] | -0.090 [0.232] | 0.100 [0.174] | -0.130 [0.166] |
| FailXModerator | 0.072 [0.121] | -0.163 [0.151] | 0.087 [0.063] | -0.014 [0.233] | -0.153 [0.175] | -0.046 [0.165] |
| Constant | 8.148*** [0.154] | 8.045*** [0.310] | 8.195*** [0.138] | 8.024*** [0.073] | 8.123*** [0.096] | 8.244*** [0.083] |
| Observations | 2,773 | 2,586 | 2,586 | 2,148 | 2,586 | 2,773 |

Note: Standard errors in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table D2: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects (AIIB Experiment)

| | (1) Age | (2) Education | (3) Income | (4) CCP Member | (5) Urban Hukou | (6) Female |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Successful Expansion | 0.251 [0.213] | -0.342 [0.303] | -0.011 [0.204] | -0.107 [0.098] | -0.021 [0.140] | -0.023 [0.118] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.233 [0.213] | -0.212 [0.306] | -0.418** [0.206] | -0.182* [0.098] | -0.164 [0.139] | 0.002 [0.118] |
| Moderator | 0.174*** [0.059] | -0.147* [0.082] | 0.023 [0.048] | 0.221 [0.167] | -0.063 [0.128] | -0.226* [0.126] |
| SuccessXModerator | -0.146* [0.082] | 0.100 [0.114] | -0.027 [0.068] | 0.093 [0.230] | -0.099 [0.182] | -0.174 [0.179] |
| FailXModerator | 0.030 [0.083] | 0.020 [0.116] | 0.095 [0.068] | 0.152 [0.235] | 0.018 [0.181] | -0.413** [0.179] |
| Constant | 7.288*** [0.150] | 8.066*** [0.219] | 7.627*** [0.146] | 7.651*** [0.069] | 7.726*** [0.097] | 7.793*** [0.085] |
| Observations | 3,138 | 3,138 | 3,138 | 3,138 | 3,138 | 3,138 |

Note: Standard errors in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table D3: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects (Vaccine Aid Experiment)

| | (1) Age | (2) Education | (3) Income | (4) CCP Member | (5) Urban Hukou | (6) Female |
|----------------------|------------|------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Successful Expansion | -0.322* | 0.279 | 0.001 | 0.078 | -0.146 | -0.147 |
| | [0.179] | [0.326] | [0.176] | [0.255] | [0.113] | [0.116] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.102 | -0.015 | -0.030 | 0.066 | -0.010 | -0.162 |
| | [0.180] | [0.327] | [0.180] | [0.253] | [0.114] | [0.113] |
| Moderator | -0.008 | 0.008 | 0.044 | 0.355** | -0.003 | -0.171 |
| | [0.058] | [0.083] | [0.040] | [0.148] | [0.111] | [0.112] |
| SuccessXModerator | 0.102 | -0.148 | -0.044 | -0.166 | 0.042 | 0.051 |
| | [0.082] | [0.117] | [0.056] | [0.209] | [0.155] | [0.155] |
| FailXModerator | -0.031 | -0.056 | -0.047 | -0.189 | -0.282* | -0.017 |
| | [0.081] | [0.118] | [0.056] | [0.205] | [0.155] | [0.155] |
| Constant | 8.513*** | 8.476*** | 8.371*** | 8.079*** | 8.499*** | 8.590*** |
| | [0.128] | [0.230] | [0.127] | [0.182] | [0.081] | [0.083] |
| Observations | 2,920 | 2,920 | 2,920 | 2,899 | 2,920 | 2,920 |

Note: Standard errors in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Appendix E: Mediation Analysis

Table E1 presents the underlying regression output that was used to generate the estimates of the total, mediation, and direct effects in Figure 1, which tests the hypothesis that national pride mediates the relationship between the failed expansion treatment and central-government support. Table E2 presents the underlying regression output that was used to generate the estimates of the total, mediation, and direct effects in Figure 2, which tests the hypothesis that economic evaluations mediate the relationship between the failed expansion treatment and central-government support.

Table E1: Mediation Models for National Pride

| | BRI | | AIIB | | Vaccine Aid | |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | National Pride | Satisfaction | National | Satisfaction | National Pride | Satisfaction |
| Successful Expansion | -0.014 [0.092] | -0.070 [0.077] | -0.043 [0.105] | -0.121 [0.086] | -0.179*** [0.065] | 0.007 [0.053] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.165* [0.092] | -0.127* [0.071] | -0.204* [0.104] | -0.128 [0.091] | -0.126* [0.059] | -0.077 [0.059] |
| National Pride | | 0.548*** [0.020] | | 0.592*** [0.021] | | 0.637*** [0.025] |
| CCP Member | -0.005 [0.100] | 0.319*** [0.070] | 0.294*** [0.103] | 0.141 [0.104] | 0.343*** [0.073] | 0.056 [0.075] |
| Age | -0.059 [0.067] | 0.058 [0.045] | -0.095* [0.054] | 0.077* [0.044] | -0.107*** [0.031] | 0.051 [0.033] |
| Education | 0.009 [0.065] | -0.009 [0.071] | -0.166** [0.073] | 0.031 [0.079] | -0.127*** [0.043] | 0.012 [0.051] |
| Income | -0.034 [0.031] | 0.001 [0.025] | 0.044 [0.045] | -0.029 [0.033] | 0.008 [0.021] | 0.010 [0.025] |
| Urban Hukou | -0.245*** [0.078] | -0.011 [0.053] | -0.288*** [0.082] | 0.101 [0.075] | -0.178*** [0.054] | 0.011 [0.057] |
| Female | -0.008 [0.087] | -0.403*** [0.061] | -0.087 [0.098] | -0.351*** [0.081] | 0.156*** [0.056] | -0.245*** [0.050] |
| Constant | 9.162*** [0.215] | 3.317*** [0.273] | 9.385*** [0.238] | 2.469*** [0.327] | 9.566*** [0.138] | 2.396*** [0.290] |
| Controls | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Observations | 2,148 | 2,148 | 2,162 | 2,162 | 2,899 | 2,899 |

Note: Standard errors in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table E2: Mediation Models for Economic Evaluations

| | BRI | | AIIB | | Vaccine Aid | |
|------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | Econ Prospects | Satisfaction | Econ | Satisfaction | Econ Prospects | Satisfaction |
| Successful | -0.099 [0.091] | -0.016 [0.078] | -0.306*** [0.100] | 0.062 [0.084] | -0.073 [0.077] | -0.056 [0.050] |
| Failed Expansion | -0.156* [0.090] | -0.119* [0.071] | -0.164* [0.100] | 0.023 [0.084] | -0.044 [0.082] | -0.127* [0.066] |
| Econ Prospects | | 0.626*** [0.019] | | 0.695*** [0.023] | | 0.693*** [0.023] |
| CCP Member | 0.134 [0.107] | 0.233*** [0.074] | 0.250** [0.110] | 0.098 [0.079] | 0.242*** [0.078] | 0.106 [0.067] |
| Age | -0.022 [0.064] | 0.040 [0.044] | -0.146*** [0.043] | 0.129*** [0.041] | -0.077** [0.035] | 0.036 [0.032] |
| Education | -0.026 [0.072] | 0.012 [0.065] | -0.246*** [0.056] | 0.104* [0.061] | -0.078 [0.049] | -0.015 [0.042] |
| Income | -0.032 [0.032] | 0.002 [0.020] | 0.027 [0.032] | -0.006 [0.027] | 0.024 [0.024] | -0.002 [0.020] |
| Urban Hukou | -0.115 [0.076] | -0.073 [0.051] | -0.130 [0.088] | -0.002 [0.064] | -0.036 [0.051] | -0.077* [0.046] |
| Female | -0.133* [0.071] | -0.325*** [0.050] | -0.318*** [0.096] | -0.115* [0.061] | -0.073 [0.063] | -0.095** [0.046] |
| Constant | 8.757*** [0.212] | 2.853*** [0.267] | 9.178*** [0.228] | 1.524*** [0.262] | 8.692*** [0.166] | 2.458*** [0.240] |
| Controls | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Observations | 2,148 | 2,148 | 2,176 | 2,176 | 2,899 | 2,899 |

Note: Standard errors in brackets. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table E3 provides sensitivity analysis for the main finding from our mediation analysis, which is that national pride is a statistically significant mediator. The identification of causal mediation effects relies on the “sequential ignorability” assumption, which states there are no pre-treatment covariates that confound the relationship between the treatment and the mediator or the relationship between the mediator and outcome. Because the treatment was randomly assigned, the relationship between treatment and mediator should not be confounded. The inclusion of pre-treatment covariates in the models makes it more plausible that the relationship between mediators and outcome is not confounded, but this assumption cannot be directly tested. Absent such a test, we use sensitivity analyses to help determine whether the mediation results are robust to possible violations of this assumption.

To assess the sensitivity of our estimates, we follow the approach developed by Imai et al. (2011). The intuition behind this sensitivity analysis is that the presence of pre-treatment confounding (i.e. a violation of the sequential ignorability assumption) would produce a correlation between the error term of the mediator model and the error term for the outcome model. If the mediation effects would continue to be statistically significant even when the error terms are strongly correlated, this would indicate that the results are insensitive to violations of this assumption.

Table E3 reports the rho value for which the average causal mediation effect (ACME) of “National Pride” reaches zero. The rho value refers to the correlation between the error term of the mediator model and the error term of the outcome model. We find that National Pride would continue to have a positive mediation effect so long as rho is less than 0.54 in BRI and vaccine aid experiments and below 0.57 in the AIIB experiment. Thus, it would require very strong error correlation and thus very strong violations of this assumption to overturn the main result of our mediation analysis.

Table E3: Sensitivity Analysis

| Experiment | Rho At Which ACME = 0 |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| BRI | 0.54 |
| AIIB | 0.57 |
| Vaccine Aid | 0.54 |