

Effect of diplomatic recognition and other diplomatic efforts on feeling of trust and acceptance of diversity

Exposure to positive information about diplomatic efforts results in a moderate increase in feelings of trust toward foreign countries and agencies.

Geographical region: South Asia, Middle East & North Africa

Effect size: Small effect ($g = 0.093$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (2 studies; 10 ES)

Short summary

Exposure to positive information about diplomatic efforts results in a moderate increase in feelings of trust toward foreign countries and agencies. Positive diplomatic messaging on social media significantly improved Indian perceptions of China, fostering trust. International recognition of Palestine by the UN increased support for territorial partition among Palestinians and enhanced trust in international actors. Both interventions effectively shaped public attitudes in their respective contexts.

We have low confidence in the cell findings due to a limited number of studies.

Long summary

The interventions

The cell used two types of China's public diplomacy: positive messages highlighting aid and cooperation, and negative messages featuring aggressive nationalism and criticism of the U.S. It has also examined the impact of Palestine's international recognition by the United Nations, focusing on the political support and trust in the UN.

How the intervention is expected to work

In the cell, the interventions aim to influence public perceptions by shaping how individuals view political entities. In the first study, the positive public diplomacy messages are expected to enhance trust and foster a favourable view of China through soft power, focusing on aid and cooperation, while negative messages aim to provoke engagement but risk increasing divisiveness. In the second study, international recognition of Palestine is expected to improve perceptions of alignment with the global community and increase trust in the United Nations as a legitimate actor. The similarity lies in their goal of fostering trust and improving relationships. The difference is in the nature of the intervention: one is diplomatic messaging from a state, while the other involves international recognition and its symbolic impact.

The evidence base

The cell consists of two studies and both studies employed experimental designs to assess the effects of diplomatic interventions on public perceptions. The first study was conducted in India, the second took place in Palestine.

Evidence findings

Positive public diplomacy improved trust in China, while negative messaging about the United States backfired having an adverse effect also on trust in China. International recognition increased perceived global support for Palestine and trust in the UN's legitimacy.

Included studies

Mattingly (2022) examines the effects of public diplomacy efforts by China to shape public perceptions in India, especially in relation to trust and acceptance of diversity. The intervention centres around two types of public diplomacy messages: positive public diplomacy (Foreign Aid): messages focused on China's aid and cooperation with India, highlighting China's support during the COVID-19 pandemic, infrastructure projects, and economic cooperation. These messages aimed to foster trust and improve perceptions of China's government and its people. Negative public diplomacy (Wolf Warrior): Messages that emphasize criticism of the United States and aggressive nationalist rhetoric. This type of messaging aimed to engage Indian audiences but may have had counterproductive effects, potentially reduced acceptance of diversity and promoting divisive perceptions of China. The study utilized a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups: positive diplomacy (Foreign Aid): exposed to messages emphasizing China's positive contributions (e.g., aid, support during the pandemic); negative diplomacy (Wolf Warrior): exposed to messages focusing on aggressive rhetoric against the U.S. and promoting China's nationalistic stance; placebo/control: exposed to neutral messages unrelated to politics (entertainment content). Total sample size was 4,677 Indian participants. The sample was randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups. Exposure to positive diplomacy increased trust ($p=0.011$) in China's government. Positive messages led to more favourable views of Chinese people ($p=0.038$) and an increased support for economic and defence cooperation ($p=0.003$). In addition, positive messaging improved views on China's COVID response (<0.001). Exposure to negative messages did not improve any outcome and may backfire. These findings indicate that negative public diplomacy had detrimental effects on trust and acceptance of diversity. The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study as this study provides experimental evidence on the differential effects of positive and negative public diplomacy, with the caveat that the findings related to the impact of a crisis, the study was not pre-registered and should be interpreted with lower confidence.

Shelef (2017) examine how international recognition of statehood affects public attitudes toward territorial compromise in conflicts involving self-determination. Specifically, it evaluates the impact of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) recognition of Palestine as a non-member observer state in 2012. the effect of international recognition on perceptions of international support, with two outcomes: perceived proximity between the Palestinian position and the international community, and trust in the United Nations. The study was conducted in the West Bank, Palestine. The research employed a combination of a panel survey (two waves) and a survey experiment. Panel survey conducted in September 2011 (before recognition) and November 2012 (after recognition). Survey experiment used real-world framing based on news articles about the recognition event, with a control group reading neutral content. For panel survey, initial sample of 200 respondents, with 134 re-interviewed in the second wave. Survey experiment included 226 respondents (both new and panel respondents). The results indicates that international recognition increased the odds of respondents perceiving the Palestinian position as "almost identical" to that of the international community by about 80% ($p<0.02$). This suggests that recognition positively influenced how respondents viewed the international political support for Palestine. In addition, international recognition increased the odds of respondents having "very much" trust in the United Nations by over 60% ($p<0.05$). This indicates that recognition contributed to greater trust in the UN as a legitimate actor in the peace process. This study is rated as high confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

The overall confidence in the cell findings is low due to a limited number of studies.

Other outcomes in the study

- Violence and atrocity prevention/Diplomatic relations & Peaceful dispute resolution