Divide to Conquer:
Using Wedge Narratives To Influence Diaspora Communities[*]

Patrick J. Chester[†]
University of California, San Diego

Audrye Wong[‡]
University of Southern California

Abstract

As authoritarian regimes increasingly adapt domestic tools for outward-facing propaganda, they often target diasporas for internal stability and foreign policy reasons. We develop a theory of diaspora-targeted propaganda in which autocratic governments use wedge narratives – identity-based and political – to divide diaspora from host countries, by framing racial discrimination and violence as targeting the diaspora and alternative political systems as inferior. We test our theory in the salient case of China. We measure propaganda framing with an unsupervised machine learning methodology, word embeddings, and apply it to data scraped from a prominent social media platform, WeChat. Consistent with our expectations, Chinese government accounts amplify coverage of anti-Asian racism and hate crimes in the United States, and portray democracies as chaotic and corrupt. These findings suggest that diaspora-targeted propaganda strategies can undermine the functioning of democratic and multicultural societies as part of an authoritarian foreign influence toolkit.

There is a growing body of qualitative evidence that authoritarian governments are targeting propaganda towards diaspora communities and co-ethnics abroad in an attempt to shape diaspora behavior and increase support for the home government's policies. Many studies have focused on the Russia case[1]. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian state media have repeatedly claimed that ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking citizens are being persecuted in Ukraine, using this as a justification for annexing Crimea and invading Ukraine[2]. Russian-language media often spread fake or exaggerated stories discrediting U.S. and European governments and societies while highlighting shared post-Soviet identities[3]. With respect to China, Chinese state media have discussed publicly how Asians have a low social status in America, are ignored by U.S. politicians and unprotected by the legal system, and are victims of deep-rooted racism as well as anti-China sentiment[4]. Why do autocracies target diaspora with propaganda, what rhetorical strategies do they employ, and how can we measure this behavior in a systematic way? In this paper, we develop a theory of wedge narratives and use novel data gathered from the Chinese social media platform, WeChat.

Our theory of diaspora-targeted propaganda posits that autocracies have two main incentives to shape diaspora attitudes and behavior: first, they seek to prevent threatening ideologies, such as liberal democracy, from being imported home and undermining regime stability; second, they wish to use diaspora as a means to influence host society politics in line with home government interests. The propaganda used to achieve these goals takes the form of "wedge narratives" – a strategic narrative designed to decrease the

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[1] Joanna Szostek. "Russia and the News Media in Ukraine: A Case of "Soft Power" ?" In: *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures* 28.3 (Aug. 2014), pp. 463–486. ISSN: 0888-3254, 1533-8371. DOI: 10.1177/0888325414537297. URL: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0888325414537297 (visited on 06/08/2023); Joanna Szostek. "The power and limits of Russia's strategic narrative in Ukraine: the role of linkage." In: *Perspectives on Politics* 15.2 (June 2017). MAG ID: 2624449369, pp. 379–395. DOI: 10.1017/s153759271700007x; Kira Harris. "Russia's Fifth Column: The Influence of the Night Wolves Motorcycle Club." In: *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43.4 (Apr. 2020), pp. 259–273. ISSN: 1057-610X, 1521-0731. DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2018.1455373. URL: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1455373 (visited on 06/08/2023).

[2] Max Fisher. "Putin's Baseless Claims of Genocide Hint at More Than War." In: *New York Times* (Feb. 2022). February 19.

[3] Todd C. Helmus et al. *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe*. Tech. rep. RAND Corporation, 2018; Bertrand Benoit and Georgi Kantchev. "The Ukraine War Is Tearing Apart the West's Largest Russian Diaspora." In: *Wall Street Journal* (July 2023).

[4] Jun Ai and Hui Zhang. "Vulnerable Asians struggle in American concrete jungle." In: *Global Times* (Jan. 2022). January 2022; Jun Ai. "Is Washington Post fueling Asian fear hysteria?" In: *Global Times* (Apr. 2021). April 8.

political or social attractiveness of the host country and increase diaspora support for and identification with the homeland. We identify two types of wedge narratives: an identity wedge that emphasizes how diaspora communities are treated as outsiders by the host and are targets of ethnic discrimination and racial violence; and a political wedge that highlights the downsides of the host country's political system, such as the chaotic nature of democratic governance.

We test our theory by examining whether China targets Chinese diaspora in the United States with wedge narratives. China is an important test case due to its expanding geopolitical significance, its large emigrant population, and the Chinese government's longstanding use of propaganda as a political tool. We scrape and analyze content from China's most popular news and social media platform – WeChat. WeChat is the overwhelmingly dominant communications platform for Chinese citizens and diaspora, the latter of whom use the app to stay in touch with family and friends in China and communicate with fellow diaspora. Given tight political control that has limited researcher access, WeChat remains relatively understudied using automated text analysis. This paper is one of the first efforts to collect and analyze the full text of WeChat subscription account posts on a large scale.[5]

To examine the Chinese government's use of wedge narratives, we compare the rhetorical framings used in government-linked accounts versus regular private accounts (owned by individuals or businesses), both of which target diaspora communities in the United States. In our analysis, we employ an unsupervised machine learning methodology to quantify propaganda narratives: the word embeddings model. Following the measurement strategy employed in Chester (2024), we fit skip-gram word embeddings models on the text of WeChat account posts.[6] We draw on both descriptive and statistical analyses to examine differences in narrative framing between government and private accounts. We further validate our measurement strategy and findings with qualitative reading of articles randomly chosen from the corpus. Using our WeChat data and embeddings-based measurement strategy, we find statistically sig-

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[5]Lu and Pan have previously published a paper that analyzed WeChat data. (Yingdan Lu and Jennifer Pan. "Capturing Clicks: How the Chinese Government Uses Clickbait to Compete for Visibility." In: *Political Communication* 38.1-2 [2021], pp. 23–54)

[6]Patrick J. Chester. "Framing Democracy: Characterizing China's Negative Legitimation Propaganda Strategy using Word Embeddings." 2024.

nificant evidence for the use of wedge narratives in government propaganda towards Chinese diaspora in the United States. A manual reading of samples of WeChat articles confirms our word embeddings analysis as accurately capturing the content of diaspora-targeted propaganda.

On the study of diaspora-targeted propaganda, we make three specific contributions. First, we identify why autocracies may target diaspora with propaganda, and theorize two types of wedge narratives – identity-based and political – that may be used to influence the diaspora in line with home government interests. Second, while most scholarship has focused on Russia, we examine the case of China and how it is shaping the diaspora information environment in the United States. Third, in complement to existing qualitative studies, we apply a new machine learning methodology to analyze propaganda at a large scale.

Our argument of wedge narratives also contributes to work on autocratic propaganda and Chinese propaganda strategies more broadly. Creating tailored and timely propaganda about host countries requires considerable external sophistication, beyond the standard tale of bombarding audiences with heavy-handed pro-regime propaganda. Such wedge propaganda has greater potential to be compelling and persuasive because it often capitalizes on issues such as group identity that can trigger deep-rooted emotional and psychological responses.

Additionally, our findings shed light on outward-facing authoritarian propaganda in comparison to domestic propaganda. We point to how diaspora-targeted propaganda strategies can differ from and complement domestic ones, which in the Chinese context centers on censoring collective action and flooding information while avoiding engagement with sensitive issues[7]. Diaspora-targeted propaganda often tackles current contentious political and social issues through a framing that aligns with government objectives, which may in fact spur collective action outside China against Western or rival host countries. It capitalizes on identity tensions and dilemmas of belonging that diasporic individuals typically face in the host country context. Wedge narratives seek to actively divide by highlighting controversy, rather than simply silencing criticism.

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[7] Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E Roberts. "How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression." In: *American political science Review* 107.2 (2013), pp. 326–343; Margaret E Roberts. *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall*. Princeton University Press, 2018.

Finally, the use of diaspora-targeted wedge narratives has implications for the healthy functioning of democratic societies as well as broader geopolitical competition. Such propaganda exacerbates political and social rifts, and affects the political attitudes and behavior of diaspora communities, who constitute legitimate constituencies. Autocratic home governments could plausibly shape the information environment of diaspora populations in ways that undermine transparent and civil discourse, and worsen democratic dysfunction. Moreover, when the home and host countries perceive each other as geopolitical rivals, as in the case of contemporary U.S.-China relations, home government efforts to target its diaspora have ramifications for broader competition for global influence. Beijing is increasingly using overseas propaganda and disinformation campaigns to shape public discourse and improve China's image. Wedge narratives are in line with Beijing's recent efforts to highlight the differing performance of political systems – attacking the legitimacy of liberal democratic political systems while lauding China's own model and achievements[8]. The Chinese government has also ramped up foreign influence operations, which include calling on diaspora communities to advocate for Beijing's interests abroad. Examining the goals and strategies of diaspora-targeted propaganda helps scholars and policymakers better understand the expanding authoritarian toolkit of foreign influence and interference.

Our paper also notes some limitations that we hope will be addressed by future research. While we document the presence and strategies of diaspora-targeted propaganda, we do not examine the consequences of consuming this propaganda, such as how successful it is in changing diaspora attitudes or behavior. That said, we believe that understanding what kinds of narratives are used by autocracies toward their diaspora will aid future efforts to document these effects on individual beliefs and behavior.

Information Operations, Authoritarian Propaganda, and the Diaspora

The rise of social media and new information communication technologies has allowed illiberal actors to exploit informational openness for their own political advantage. To preserve their domestic rule,

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[8]Chester, "Framing Democracy: Characterizing China's Negative Legitimation Propaganda Strategy using Word Embeddings"; Audrye Wong and Meir Alkon. "Political Demonstration Effects: Authoritarian Informational Statecraft and Public Support for Democracy." In: *working paper* (2023).

autocrats have honed new tools of information manipulation, censorship, and propaganda to promote their authority and eliminate threats[9], while adopting new strategies such as using click bait to increase the visibility of political propaganda[10]. Authoritarian governments have used state-run propaganda to fuel nationalism[11] and portray democratic politics as chaotic to domestic audiences[12].

While scholarship on autocratic propaganda has traditionally focused on domestic audiences[13], autocrats are also adapting their domestic state apparatus of information control and propaganda for outward facing purposes[14]. A growing body of work examines how overseas propaganda campaigns can promote positive stories, spread misinformation, and frame narratives in biased ways[15]. Foreign influence operations have sought to interfere with electoral outcomes, shift the political agenda, and encourage political polarization[16], posing added challenges to the performance and legitimacy of democratic political systems[17]. Misinformation and propaganda from illiberal sources, particularly when spread on freewheeling social media platforms, has the potential to exploit psychological biases and entrench deep-rooted mis-

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[9] Roberts, *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall*; Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman. "Informational Autocrats." In: *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33.4 (2019), pp. 100–127.

[10] Lu and Pan, "Capturing Clicks: How the Chinese Government Uses Clickbait to Compete for Visibility."

[11] Haifeng Huang. "From "the Moon Is Rounder Abroad" to "Bravo, My Country": How China Misperceives the World." In: *Studies in Comparative International Development* 56 (2021), pp. 112–130.

[12] Chester, "Framing Democracy: Characterizing China's Negative Legitimation Propaganda Strategy using Word Embeddings."

[13] e.g., Chuyu Liu and Xiao Ma. "Popular threats and nationalistic propaganda: Political logic of China's patriotic campaign." In: *Security Studies* 27.4 (2018), pp. 633–664; King, Pan, and Roberts, "How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression"; Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E Roberts. "How the Chinese government fabricates social media posts for strategic distraction, not engaged argument." In: *American political science review* 111.3 (2017), pp. 484–501.

[14] Joshua A. Tucker et al. "From Liberation to Turmoil: Social Media and Democracy." In: *Journal of Democracy* 28.4 (2017), pp. 46–59; Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman. "The Janus Face of the Liberal International Information Order: When Global Institutions Are Self-Undermining." In: *International Organization* (2021).

[15] Katherine Ognyanova et al. "Misinformation in action: Fake news exposure is linked to lower trust in media, higher trust in government when your side is in power." In: *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* (2020); Vanessa Molter and Renee Diresta. "Pandemics and propaganda: how Chinese state media creates and propagates CCP coronavirus narratives." In: *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* (2020).

[16] Diego A. Martin, Jacob N. Shapiro, and Michelle Nedashkovskaya. "Recent Trends in Online Foreign Influence Efforts." In: *Journal of Information Warfare* 18.3 (2019), pp. 15–48.

[17] Nina Jankowicz. *How to Lose the Information War: Russia, Fake News, and the Future of Conflict*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020.

perceptions[18]. Authoritarian overseas propaganda has been used to influence attitudes on foreign affairs[19] and foreign public support for democracy[20].

Diaspora-Targeted Propaganda and Why Autocrats Care

One subset of authoritarian propaganda that has been less studied is propaganda targeted toward the diaspora. In line with the academic literature, we use the term diaspora to refer broadly to emigrant or dispersed communities who are living away from a professed place of origin but have some degree of orientation to their homeland and maintain an element of group identity[21]. While the concept of the diaspora has evolved over time, it more often than not involves complex and sometimes contested triangular relations with the home country and the host country[22].

Why might autocrats care about diaspora populations? Diasporas matter for both reasons of internal stability and foreign policy. First, authoritarian regimes are likely concerned that diasporas can undermine regime stability. Diasporas can transmit information back home about different political or social norms, including democratic values, that can threaten the home government's rule[23]. Exposure to foreign ideas can induce anti-regime activities[24]. For example, North Korea actively attempts to discredit and vilify defector diasporas[25]. Second, homeland governments have sought to use diaspora populations for broader

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[18]D.J. Flynn, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. "The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs About Politics." In: *Political Psychology* 38.51 (2017), pp. 127–150; Rose McDermott. "Three Tweets to Midnight: Effects of the Global Information Ecosystem on the Risk of Nuclear Conflict." In: ed. by Harold A. Trinkunas, Herbert Lin, and Benjamin Loehrke. Hoover Institution, 2020. Chap. Psychological Underpinnings of Post-truth in Political Beliefs.

[19]Erin Baggott Carter and Brett L. Carter. "Questioning More: RT, Outward Facing Propaganda, and the Post-West World Order." In: *Security Studies* 30.1 (2021).

[20]Wong and Alkon, "Political Demonstration Effects: Authoritarian Informational Statecraft and Public Support for Democracy."

[21]Rogers Brubaker. "The 'diaspora' diaspora." In: *Ethnic and racial studies* 28.1 (2005), pp. 1–19; Alan Gamlen. *Human geopolitics: States, emigrants, and the rise of diaspora institutions*. Oxford University Press, 2019; Jonathan. Grossman. "Toward a definition of diaspora." In: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42.8 (2019), pp. 1263–1282.

[22]William Safran. "Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return." In: *Diaspora: A journal of transnational studies* 1.1 (1991), pp. 83–99.

[23]Clarisa Pérez-Armendáriz. "Cross-border discussions and political behavior in migrant-sending countries." In: *Studies in Comparative International Development* 49.1 (2014), pp. 67–88.

[24]Laurie A Brand. *Citizens abroad: Emigration and the state in the Middle East and North Africa*. Cambridge University Press, 2006; Alexander Dukalskis. *Making the World Safe for Dictatorship*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

[25]Sheena Chestnut Greitens. *Politics of the North Korean Diaspora*. Cambridge University Press, 2023.

foreign geopolitical objectives, such as to deepen transnational ties, operate as lobbies in host societies and promote home government interests, legitimize revisionist policies, or compete for political influence[26].

Shaping the informational environment can be a powerful way of affecting diaspora attitudes and behavior. Political actors have often turned to rhetoric and legitimation strategies to mobilize public support for foreign policy[27]. Rallying diaspora support for the home state's domestic and foreign policies requires a shared narrative that motivates individuals to act in concert. A public space where information and ideas are exchanged facilitates the development of a common cultural repertoire and expression, while consolidating identity formation in relation to the homeland[28]. Home governments can use propaganda to create shared symbols and meanings among diaspora populations, forge an integrated identity, and serve as the foundation for instigating coordinated actions on behalf of the home state[29]. Diaspora media that actively articulates the home state's policy positions and propagates nationalist sentiments will tend to put the diaspora community at odds with host societies[30].

In the extant literature, there is some qualitative evidence that authoritarian governments have used and spread diaspora-targeted strategic narratives, defined as an explanation of the world that is pushed towards a target audience with the goal of advancing strategic interests[31]. For example, Moscow has fre-

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[26]Charles King and Neil J. Melvin. "Diaspora Politics: Ethnic Linkages, Foreign Policy, and Security in Eurasia." In: *International Security* 24.3 (Winter 1999/2000), pp. 108–138; Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth. "Diasporas and International Relations Theory." In: *International Organization* 57 (2003), pp. 449–479; Fiona B. Adamson. "Crossing Borders: International Migration and National Security." In: *International Security* 31.1 (2006); Todd C. Helmus. *Russian social media influence: understanding Russian propaganda in Eastern Europe.* In collab. with Rand Corporation et al. Research report (Rand Corporation) RR-2237-OSD. OCLC: on1031950174. Santa Monica, Calif: RAND Corporation, 2018. 130 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8330-9957-0; Gerasimos Tsourapas. "Authoritarian emigration states: Soft power and cross-border mobility in the Middle East." In: *International Political Science Review* 39.3 (2018), pp. 400–416; Harris Mylonas and Marko Zilovic. "Foreign policy priorities and ethnic return migration policies: group-level variation in Greece and Serbia." In: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45.4 (2019), pp. 613–635.

[27]Stacie E. Goddard and Ronald R. Krebs. "Rhetoric, Legitimation, and Grand Strategy." In: *Security Studies* 24.1 (2015), pp. 5–36.

[28]Guobin Yang. "The Internet and the rise of a transnational Chinese cultural sphere." In: *Media, Culture & Society* 25.4 (2003), pp. 469–490; Seyla Benhabib. *Situating the self: Gender, community, and postmodernism in contemporary ethics.* Psychology Press, 1992.

[29]Xiaojun Yan and La Li. "Propaganda beyond state borders: the deployment of symbolic resources to mobilize political support among the Chinese diaspora." In: *The Pacific Review* (2021).

[30]Wanning Sun. *Chinese-language media in Australia: Developments, Challenges and Opportunities.* Tech. rep. Australia-China Relations Institute, 2016.

[31]Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O'Loughlin. "Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power." In: *Media, War & Conflict* 7.1 (Mar. 2014). MAG ID: 2315692094, pp. 70–84. DOI: 10.1177/1750635213516696.

quently attempted to rally support from Russian diaspora by framing itself as the protector of ethnic Russians against hostile host governments, particularly in Eastern Europe and the Baltics[32]. Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, Russian-affiliated but Ukraine-based media outlets targeted Russian speakers in Ukraine with pro-Russia and anti-Ukrainian narratives[33]. Media reports describe Kremlin propaganda seeking to persuade Russian-speaking communities in Germany that they are not accepted by the host society, leading to internal diaspora rifts over the Ukraine war[34]. As these examples show, much of existing scholarship on the subject of diaspora-targeted propaganda has focused on Russia. Recent work on North Korea highlights the use of propaganda about diaspora but targeted for consumption by broader domestic and international audiences[35]. In this paper, we examine China as another case of a capable autocracy, develop a theory of wedge narratives to explain the incentives and strategies behind autocratic diaspora-targeted propaganda, and provide novel quantitative evidence in support of our theory.

The Vulnerability of Diaspora Communities to Information Manipulation

Given that autocracies target diaspora with narratives, to what extent do we expect diaspora to be susceptible to these tactics? Diaspora populations are likely to be more vulnerable to the distortion and manipulation of facts and narratives than other residents of their host country. First, the diaspora information environment is more likely to be fragmented from the rest of the host country. Language use affects the nature of diaspora networks and the degree of political engagement with the host country[36]. Linguistic and cultural differences may limit individuals' access to sources of information that are less representative of the host country and more easily influenced by the home state. Language barriers make it harder to find alternative, reliable sources for fact checking.

[32]Joanna Szostek. "Russian influence on news media in Belarus." In: *Communist and Post-communist Studies* 48.2 (June 2015). MAG ID: 772375596, pp. 123–135. DOI: 10.1016/j.postcomstud.2015.06.007; Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe*.

[33]Szostek, "Russian influence on news media in Belarus."

[34]Benoit and Kantchev, "The Ukraine War Is Tearing Apart the West's Largest Russian Diaspora."

[35]Greitens, *Politics of the North Korean Diaspora*.

[36]Amy H. Liu. *The Language of Political Incorporation: Chinese Migrants in Europe*. Temple University Press, 2021.

Second, a reliance on diaspora-centered social networks also exacerbates the echo chamber effect, in which a more homogeneous user base amplifies like-minded opinions in a relatively closed information system. Individuals are more likely to believe and trust in information from others in their social networks who have overlapping backgrounds and experiences – who are more like them. Evidence shows that information from social peers and networks affects policy preferences and voting behavior[37].

Third, illiberal home governments such as China, Russia, or Iran are more likely to actively intervene in diaspora information environments to control or at least shape the content and tone of narratives. Such intervention can be economic – leveraging advertising revenue or direct ownership of media outlets to pressure journalists and editors to censor coverage that is politically sensitive and critical of the home regime, or promote coverage that reflects the regime in a positive light[38]. Intervention can also be political – threatening the safety and livelihoods of diasporic individuals and their families, or dangling economic or political incentives to entice the support of diaspora entrepreneurs and media tycoons[39]. Growing authoritarian use of propaganda and censorship overseas has often led to a domination of diaspora media landscapes and reduced diversity of viewpoints, including the drowning out of longstanding diaspora community voices[40].

Certainly, attempts to exert informational control can face challenges. Diasporic individuals – depending in part on their levels of socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural assimilation with host society – may have alternative sources of information, or may be inherently skeptical of or indifferent to diaspora-language media. On the other hand, waves of more recent diaspora migrants, who are more likely to have closer emotional and familial ties to the home state, increase the demand for homeland-sourced information[41]. Government propaganda is likely to meet varied success with across different segments of the

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[37] Joshua D Kertzer and Thomas Zeitzoff. "A bottom-up theory of public opinion about foreign policy." In: *American Journal of Political Science* 61.3 (2017), pp. 543–558; James E Alt et al. "Diffusing political concerns: How unemployment information passed between social ties influences Danish voters." In: *The Journal of Politics* 84.1 (2022), pp. 000–000.

[38] Alex Joske et al. *The influence environment: A survey of Chinese-language media in Australia.* Research rep. Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2020.

[39] John Garnaut. "Toeing the line." In: *Sydney Morning Herald* (Apr. 2011). April 13.

[40] Emily Feng. "China and the world: how Beijing spreads the message." In: *Financial Times* (July 2018). July 12.

[41] Hong Liu. "New Migrants and the Revival of Overseas Chinese Nationalism." In: *Journal of Contemporary China* 14.43 (2005), pp. 291–316.

diaspora. In this paper, we focus on narratives disseminated through a Chinese-language social media platform whose main consumers tend to be more recent migrants from China, but who have also been politically and socially active in the United States.

Diaspora-Targeted Propaganda: The China Case

China presents a case of active diaspora engagement and diaspora-targeted authoritarian propaganda. Beijing's policies seek to boost diaspora loyalty and consolidate the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) domestic legitimacy[42]. The CCP also publicly calls for overseas Chinese to promote Beijing's foreign policy interests and expand China's global influence[43], including encouraging the diaspora to "tell China's story well"[44].

Recent accounts detail how CCP-linked individuals and organizations have attempted to influence host country politicians to fall in line with China's foreign policy positions[45]. Chinese students – a growing proportion of the diaspora – are also increasingly vocal defenders of Beijing. In 2017, the Chinese student association at the University of California San Diego protested against the Dalai Lama's commencement speech[46]. At Canadian universities, Chinese students similarly protested against a campus talk given by a Uighur activist, and vandalized a 'Lennon wall' of messages supporting Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters in 2019[47]. In several cases, students were reportedly acting in coordination with

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[42]Fangbin Liu. "New Era of Overseas United Front Work: Historical Position and Development Space (新时代海外统战工作的历史方位与发展空间)." In: *Overseas Chinese Affairs Study* 4 (2019).

[43]Jiechi Yang. ""Be a close friend, be a person of action, bring together diaspora hearts and strength to fully share in the China Dream – deeply learn and implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's important instructions on overseas Chinese affairs (当好贴心人 成为实干家 凝聚侨心侨力同圆共享中国梦 ————深入学习贯彻习近平总书记关于侨务工作的重要指示)." In: *Overseas Chinese Affairs Study* 3 (2017); Jiaqi M. Liu. "From "Sea Turtles" to "Grassroots Ambassadors": The Chinese Politics of Outbound Student Migration." In: *International Migration Review* (2021); Jiaqi M. Liu. "When Diaspora Politics Meet Global Ambitions: Diaspora Institutions Amid China' s Geopolitical Transformations." In: *International Migration Review* (2022).

[44]Huanping Zhang. "Draw the support of overseas Chinese to tell China's story well (借助华侨华人讲好中国故事)." In: *International Communications* 5 (2020).

[45]Anne-Marie Brady. "Magic Weapons: China' s political influence activities under Xi Jinping." In: *Wilson Center* (2017); Audrye Wong. "Peddling or Persuading: China's Economic Statecraft in Australia." In: *Journal of East Asian Studies* (2021).

[46]Stephanie Saul. "On Campuses Far From China, Still Under Beijing's Watchful Eye." In: *New York Times* (May 2017). May 4.

[47]Owen Churchill. "Chinese students' association loses status at Canadian university after protest of Uyghur activist's talk was allegedly coordinated with Chinese consulate." In: *South China Morning Post* (Sept. 2019). September 26; Ian Young. "After vandals trash Canadian university's Hong Kong-protest Lennon Wall, student society blasts 'bullying' and vows to set

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Chinese consulates.

Diaspora-targeted propaganda plays an important role in China's diaspora policies. Authoritarian strategic narratives promoting a sense of patriotism among the diaspora would likely help to constrain pro-democracy movements that could endanger the regime's grip on power, and also potentially mobilize diaspora populations to defend Beijing's interests abroad. There is early evidence that Beijing has sought to apply outward-facing censorship and propaganda tools on Chinese-language social media platforms, including WeChat[48]. However, such a phenomenon has not been explored using quantitative methods.

Of course, there is often considerable diversity within diaspora communities in terms of country of origin, recency of emigration, level of integration in the host country, connection to the home country, homeland language fluency, and other factors. This can include those who are descendants of emigrants but were born in or have lived in the host country for a long time, as well as those who hold home state citizenship but have recently moved abroad. For example, a recently-arrived university student in the United States may have a different level of attachment to China than a second-generation Chinese-American. Additionally, overseas Chinese can identify with different homelands – the People's Republic of China or the Republic of China – whose governments have sought to compete with each other for influence over the diaspora[49]. The PRC government adopts expansive diaspora policies that aim to group Chinese nationals and anyone of ethnic Chinese descent as a unified bloc having an inherent affinity with the homeland[50]. As will be discussed later, our analysis focuses on a subset of the Chinese diaspora who are active Chinese-language speakers and have more active ties to Mainland China – a subset that is often a focus of PRC government policies for domestic stability and foreign policy reasons.

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up mobile replacement." In: *South China Morning Post* (Aug. 2019). August 3.

[48] Seth Kaplan. "China's Censorship Reaches Globally Through WeChat." In: *Foreign Policy* (2023).

[49] Enze Han. "Bifurcated homeland and diaspora politics in China and Taiwan towards the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia." In: *The Microfoundations of Diaspora Politics*. Routledge, 2021, pp. 105–122.

[50] Paul Charon and Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer. *Chinese Influence Operations: A Machiavellian Moment*. Tech. rep. IRSEM, 2021.

Driving a Wedge: A Theory of Diaspora-Targeted Propaganda

While much scholarship has examined how home governments promote pro-regime attitudes among the diaspora, an important flip side to diaspora engagement – and the willingness of diaspora to support homeland interests – is the nature of diaspora relations with their host societies. How do autocratic home governments seek to influence diaspora attitudes toward host countries?

We argue that authoritarian governments use strategic narratives that drive a wedge between diaspora communities and their host societies. *Wedge narratives* are a type of strategic narrative that highlight the divisions between diaspora populations and host countries. This may decrease the political or social attractiveness of the host country and, in turn, increase diaspora support for and identification with the homeland. As discussed above, authoritarian regimes are often concerned about whether diaspora attitudes and activities may undermine internal stability. Diaspora-targeted propaganda, and in particular wedge narratives, can thus play a critical role in consolidating support for the home government while promoting homeland interests abroad.

We expect government wedge narratives to be produced through the selective framing of entities and events.[51] We define framing as promoting or adopting a particular conceptualization or thinking about a specific issue that could plausibly be viewed from a range of perspectives[52]. More specifically, we consider strategic framing to be a systematic association of pairs of concepts in service of a broader narrative that serves the actor's strategic interests. For instance, when Chinese media associate the United States with chaotic sentiment across several articles, this could create a broader strategic narrative that democracies are chaotic relative to the Chinese political model. Research in political communication has found that framing can have significant effects on political attitudes and behavior[53].

We describe two types of wedge narratives that we expect autocratic state media (including China) to be promoting with diaspora-targeted propaganda – an identity wedge and a political wedge.

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[51]We consider strategic framing to be synonymous with propaganda.

[52]Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman. "Framing Theory." In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (2007), pp. 103–26.

[53]Chong and Druckman, "Framing Theory."

Identity Wedge Narratives

First, identity wedge narratives capitalize on the multi-faceted, relatively contested nature of diaspora identity[54], which makes it more susceptible to new rhetorical framings. While sharing ethnic and cultural similarities with their homeland, including a cultivated sense of patriotism[55], diaspora are also likely to be at least somewhat integrated – socially, culturally, or politically – with the host society. Being at the interface of host and home countries, questions of diaspora identity are both more salient and more easily invoked by external actors[56]. Government policies and propaganda serve as an important focal point to activate particular elements of diasporic identity[57]. Homeland media often try to promote discourse tilting in favor of the home state, which has major effects on how diaspora conceive of their position in host societies[58].

Given the salience and malleability of ethnic and national identities, identity wedges are likely to amplify the issue of discrimination against the diaspora community. Discrimination can take the form of broad racism – prejudice based on membership in a racial or ethnic group – as well as race-based violence, entailing the use of physical force to hurt, damage, or kill someone based on their racial or ethnic identity. In this case, while host country racism and violence can affect multiple societal groups, the issue is framed as being targeted particularly at the diaspora. Framing issues of social prejudice and unequal treatment as diaspora-specific highlights political and social differences with the host country, and in turn pushes these individuals toward a more welcoming homeland and to seek solidarity with ethnic kin.

Extensive research in psychology, sociology, and political science has highlighted how discrimination and marginalization activates more explicit identification with the targeted ethnic or religious group. Individuals rejected by a dominant group attempt to alleviate negative effects on their well-being by identi-

[54]Gregor Benton and Edmund Terence Gomez. "Belonging to the nation: generational change, identity and the Chinese diaspora." In: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37.7 (2014), pp. 1157–1171.

[55]Liu, "New Migrants and the Revival of Overseas Chinese Nationalism."

[56]Shain and Barth, "Diasporas and International Relations Theory."

[57]Gamlen, *Human geopolitics: States, emigrants, and the rise of diaspora institutions*.

[58]Wanning Sun and John Sinclair, eds. *Media and Communication in the Chinese Diaspora: Rethinking transnationalism*. Routledge, 2016.

fying more closely with their own minority group[59]. A hostile context in the form of perceived discrimination and social exclusion heightens consciousness of differences and increases ethnic identification – a concept known as 'reactive ethnicity' or 'reactive identity formation'[60]. Visible displays of group-based identification can evolve as a form of resistance to denigration by the majority group[61], while heightened group solidarity can spur political mobilization. The concept of reactive group identification has been used to explain diverse cases from Latino youth activism in the United States and Turkish immigration in Germany to Muslim integration in the United States and Canada[62].

As such, identity wedge narratives can help to achieve the home government's policy goals of consolidating internal rule and promoting strategic interests. Diasporic feelings of isolation in a foreign country are more likely to stimulate greater feelings of affinity toward the homeland and increase the home country's relative appeal. Diaspora would likely become more supportive of the home government and more willing to advocate for the homeland's interests overseas. Highlighting the exclusionary nature of host societies is also likely to decrease diaspora-led diffusion of foreign ideas (such as pro-democracy sentiments), helping to ensure home regime stability.

Recent survey and experimental evidence has found that diaspora-targeted discrimination has considerable effects on diasporic political attitudes and behavior. Fan et al. (2020) have found that discrimination increases diaspora support for authoritarian rule back home and decreases belief in political reform, even among groups that are traditionally more liberal and less nationalistic for their homeland.[63] Chinese

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[59]Nyla R Branscombe, Michael T Schmitt, and Richard D Harvey. "Perceiving pervasive discrimination among African Americans: Implications for group identification and well-being." In: *Journal of personality and social psychology* 77.1 (1999), p. 135.

[60]Alejandro Portes and Rubén G Rumbaut. *Legacies: The story of the immigrant second generation.* Univ of California Press, 2001; Baljit Nagra. "'Our faith was also hijacked by those people': Reclaiming Muslim identity in Canada in a post-9/11 era." In: *Journal of ethnic and migration studies* 37.3 (2011), pp. 425–441.

[61]Çetin Çelik. "'Having a German passport will not make me German': Reactive ethnicity and oppositional identity among disadvantaged male Turkish second-generation youth in Germany." In: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38.9 (2015), pp. 1646–1662.

[62]Rubén G Rumbaut. "Reaping what you sow: Immigration, youth, and reactive ethnicity." In: *Applied development science* 12.2 (2008), pp. 108–111; Daniel Herda. "Reactive ethnicity and anticipated discrimination among American Muslims in Southeastern Michigan." In: *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 38.3 (2018), pp. 372–391; Nagra, "'Our faith was also hijacked by those people': Reclaiming Muslim identity in Canada in a post-9/11 era"; Çelik, "'Having a German passport will not make me German': Reactive ethnicity and oppositional identity among disadvantaged male Turkish second-generation youth in Germany."

[63]Yingjie Fan et al. "How Discrimination Increases Chinese Overseas Students' Support for Authoritarian Rule." In: (July

overseas students facing stigmatization have deprioritized assimilation and grown more critical of their host country government and media, while often making comparisons with the superiority of their home government[64]. Moreover, as discussed above, the process of reactive identity formation can be powerful in pushing stronger identification with the homeland. In recent years, Chinese government propaganda emphasizing humiliating incidents against overseas Chinese communities has strengthened nationalistic pro-regime sentiment among the diaspora[65]. This suggests that wedge propaganda is very likely to further consolidate such beliefs and strengthen diaspora support for the home government.

In the context of Chinese diaspora in the United States, racism and violence issues acquired particular salience since the start of the Covid pandemic in 2019. America saw a marked increase in anti-Asian hate crimes, driven at least in part by former president Donald Trump's characterization of Covid-19 as a "Chinese virus" and "Kung Flu." Individuals of Chinese descent, including senior citizens, were harassed, shoved, and even stabbed on the streets in major cities such as New York and San Francisco[66]. In March 2021, a mass shooter targeted Asian-owned spa businesses in an Atlanta suburb, killing eight people, including six of Asian descent[67].

Based on this, we expect that government-linked accounts on WeChat would be more likely than private accounts to portray issues of racial discrimination and violence in the host society in ways that highlight the direct adverse impacts on diaspora-specific identity. In the context of the United States, this would entail an amplified government framing of Asian identity groups as being targeted by racism and hate crimes, relative to private accounts (H1).

2020).

[64] Yingyi Ma and Ning Zhan. "To mask or not to mask amid the COVID-19 pandemic: How Chinese students in America experience and cope with stigma." In: *Chinese Sociological Review* 54.1 (2022), pp. 1–26.

[65] Yan and Li, "Propaganda beyond state borders: the deployment of symbolic resources to mobilize political support among the Chinese diaspora."

[66] Alexandra E. Petri and Daniel E. Slotnik. "Attacks on Asian-Americans in New York Stoke Fear, Anxiety and Anger." In: *New York Times* (July 2021). July 18.

[67] Seashia Vang. "Atlanta Shootings Strike Fear into Asian American Community." In: *Human Rights Watch* (Mar. 2021). March 18.

Political Wedge Narratives

Second, political wedge narratives focus on highlighting the downsides of the host country's political system as implicitly inferior to that of the home country. Political wedge narratives are most likely to come into play when the home government is authoritarian and the host government is a democracy.

Home government strategic narratives about other countries can be an effective way of influencing diasporic political attitudes. Individuals often evaluate their own government's performance in reference to the relative performance of other countries, a concept known as "benchmarking"[68]. China's overseas propaganda often criticizes incompetence and disarray in democratic political systems while touting the performance and procedural advantages of China's political system, which lowers foreign public support for democracy and increases support for strongman rule[69].

There is both quantitative and qualitative evidence that authoritarian governments actively employ analogous strategies towards their domestic population[70]. Such propaganda involves portraying liberal democracy as a source of political disorder. Studies have found that Chinese citizens who consume information about political instability in other countries are more inclined to express faith in China's political system, view the government as responsive, and have higher levels of trust in the Chinese government[71]. Additionally, concerns over political stability are associated with greater support for the Chinese government[72].

As such, portraying democratic countries as unstable, chaotic, and underperforming is likely to produce political dividends for an authoritarian home government. Political wedge narratives are likely to make diasporic individuals more supportive – and less critical – of the home government, thus decreas-

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[68]Mark Andreas Kayser and Michael Peress. "Benchmarking Across Borders: Electoral Accountability and the Necessity of Comparison." In: *American Political Science Review* 106.3 (2012), pp. 661–684.

[69]Wong and Alkon, "Political Demonstration Effects: Authoritarian Informational Statecraft and Public Support for Democracy."

[70]Yang Zhong. "Legitimacy crisis and legitimation in China." In: *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 26.2 (1996), pp. 201–220; Chester, "Framing Democracy: Characterizing China's Negative Legitimation Propaganda Strategy using Word Embeddings."

[71]Haifeng Huang. "International Knowledge and Domestic Evaluations in a Changing Society: the Case of China." In: *American Political Science Review* 109.3 (2015), pp. 613–634.

[72]Jie Chen, Yang Zhong, and Jan Wiliam Hillard. "The Level and Sources of Popular Support for China's Current Political Regime." In: *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 30.1 (1997), pp. 45–64.

ing the risk of potentially destabilizing ideologies from returning home. Additionally, diaspora members may be more inclined to defend the home government's interests in the host country, thus promoting foreign policy goals.

Based on this, we expect that government-linked accounts would be more likely than private accounts to portray democratic countries as chaotic (H2a). Similarly, we expect that government accounts would be more likely than private accounts to portray democratic countries as corrupt (H2b).

Scope Conditions

Our theory of wedge narratives in diaspora-targeted propaganda has two main scope conditions: the home government must possess both the motivation and capacity to produce such propaganda.

First, home governments must be sufficiently incentivized to produce propaganda that would enhance the loyalty of their diaspora to the home government as well as prevent the dissemination of ideologies that are a threat to the home government. While the former motivation may apply to both democratic and authoritarian governments, particularly those who depend on remittances, authoritarian regimes are more likely to be concerned about the diffusion of foreign liberal ideas that could spread dissent, encourage political mobilization, and weaken internal regime stability. They will thus be more motivated to shape the information flows that their diaspora are receiving overseas.

Second, home governments need to have the state capacity and technological sophistication to implement outward-facing propaganda strategies on a large scale. Propagating wedge narratives entails monitoring political developments in host countries, identifying wedge issues, producing content at a large scale, and disseminating these narratives to significant proportions of the diaspora. This is more likely with large, high-capacity authoritarian regimes, such as Russia and China, that have dedicated considerable political and technological resources to honing domestic propaganda tools and can now apply them overseas.

Government Strategic Intentions

Although it is often challenging to provide definitive evidence of government intentions, especially in opaque and low-information authoritarian systems, an analysis of Chinese government statements and articulated foreign policy goals make a compelling case for strategic intention in using wedge propaganda toward the diaspora. CCP "United Front" or overseas influence activities, which include efforts to engage with the PRC diaspora, have articulated specific goals of exploiting internal divisions among adversaries while cultivating and co-opting allies[73]. President Xi himself has referenced the importance of propaganda and public opinion manipulation in such United Front activities[74]. A comprehensive study of Beijing's policies toward the overseas Chinese highlights goals of limiting assimilation into host countries and cultivating a unified ethnonationalist identity of 'Chineseness,' with an eye to being able to mobilize the diaspora in line with government interests[75]. Recent studies of authoritarian outward-facing propaganda further point to explicit efforts to undermine democratic legitimacy[76].

On the empirical front, in Australia, the United States, and elsewhere, Chinese government officials and state media have readily portrayed criticisms of the CCP and Beijing's policies as being anti-Chinese and Sinophobic, as a way of quashing dissenting views. There is also considerable qualitative and interview evidence in the Russia case that Moscow deliberately targets Russian-speaking populations with messages about social tensions and active discrimination against Russian heritage minority populations – including fake news about ethnically-targeted attacks – as well as the corruption and chaos of democratic and capitalist systems[77]. Such policy rhetoric and action indicate that authoritarian governments such as China and Russia strategically and deliberately seek to foster divisions between the diaspora and host

[73]John Fitzgerald. *Mind your tongue: Language, public diplomacy and community cohesion in contemporary Australia-China relations*. Tech. rep. Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2019.

[74]Takashi Suzuki. "China's United Front Work in the Xi Jinping era - institutional developments and activities." In: *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies* 8.1 (2019).

[75]James Jiann Hua To. *Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Polices for the Overseas Chinese*. Brill, 2014.

[76]Wong and Alkon, "Political Demonstration Effects: Authoritarian Informational Statecraft and Public Support for Democracy"; Chester, "Framing Democracy: Characterizing China's Negative Legitimation Propaganda Strategy using Word Embeddings."

[77]Helmus, *Russian social media influence*; Benoit and Kantchev, "The Ukraine War Is Tearing Apart the West's Largest Russian Diaspora."

countries, including on the axes of ethnic identity and political beliefs.

Wedge Narratives and Alternative Propaganda Strategies

Authoritarian governments could plausibly turn to other propaganda strategies to achieve goals of promoting diaspora loyalty and advocacy. One alternative is a "pull" strategy of spreading pro-homeland narratives to directly inspire pride and affection for the home government. This would be a form of propaganda that focuses on the positive relationship between the diaspora and the home government, such as how the homeland provides material and social benefits or the rapid social and economic progress back home, as opposed to highlighting the negative ties between the diaspora and the host country. This strategy would be analogous to positive propaganda strategies (see Stockmann (2011))[78], but targeted towards a diasporic audience instead of the domestic audience. Another media strategy the Chinese government might employ is to 'flood' the information sphere with other narratives and irrelevant stories in order to divert attention from politically sensitive issues or incidents that could provoke diasporic dissent[79].

While testing the use of these different propaganda strategies is beyond the scope of this paper, we suggest a few factors affecting when wedge narratives may be more useful or salient. First, having the diaspora as a visibly recognizable ethnic minority in the host country may accentuate a sense of threat from the majority population, which facilitates the use of identity wedges. Second, the presence of existing wedge issues in the host country, while not a necessary condition, also makes wedge narratives more resonant, for instance with diaspora communities who are already relatively marginalized. On the other hand, when the diaspora have higher socioeconomic status or possess considerable political and economic influence in the host country – such as being part of a winning coalition – "pull" pro-homeland narratives may be more appealing and persuasive in sparking diaspora loyalty to the homeland and generating effective policy advocacy on behalf of the home government. As an anecdotal example, in Southeast Asia,

[78]Daniela Stockmann and Mary Gallagher. "Remote control: How the media sustain authoritarian rule in China." In: *Comparative Political Studies* 44.4 (2011). Publication Title: Comparative Political Studies Issue: 4 ISSN: 00104140, pp. 436–467. DOI: 10.1177/0010414010394773. URL: http://cps.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/0010414010376915.

[79]Roberts, *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall*; Lu and Pan, "Capturing Clicks: How the Chinese Government Uses Clickbait to Compete for Visibility."

where countries are in China's geographic backyard and local Chinese populations tend to constitute a significant part of the business elite, the Chinese government often uses pull narratives of China as a rising tide lifting all boats and calling on overseas Chinese to patriotically support the motherland's rejuvenation. In contrast, the limited demographic and political clout of Chinese-Americans in the United States points to the potential salience of wedge narratives, as we examine in this paper.

More broadly, research suggests that the effectiveness of pro-regime propaganda can be somewhat limited and conditional on factors such as preexisting levels of political trust and how closely propaganda messages align with reality[80]. In this sense, wedge narratives may be inherently more persuasive to a relatively larger swath of the diaspora population.

In considering the use of wedge narratives versus flooding approaches, the latter is more likely to be used at specific times around sensitive events relevant to the home country, in order to distract diaspora populations from engaging or mobilizing in ways that undermine home regime stability. Wedge narratives are likely to be more efficient in its strategic use of key events in the host country that are the most relevant for the diaspora and has the greater potential to reshape over the longer term how diaspora populations think about their position in the host country and by extension their relationship with the homeland. Finally, we note that these approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive – governments may choose to – and often do – use them as complementary strategies to shape the information environment.

Diaspora Information Flows: The WeChat Platform

To analyze diaspora-targeted propaganda, we examine the Chinese-language social media platform known as WeChat. Compared to traditional media such as newspapers and television, WeChat is the overwhelmingly predominant source of information and mode of communication for Chinese citizens across generations[81]. In 2021, WeChat had over 1.2 billion active users, ranking it as one of the most popular social

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[80]Dan Chen. "Political context and citizen information: Propaganda effects in China." In: *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 31.3 (2019), pp. 463–484; Haifeng Huang, Chanita Intawan, and Stephen P Nicholson. "Political trust and public support for propaganda in China." In: *Research & Politics* 11.1 (2024), p. 20531680231225308.

[81]Paul Mozur. "Forget TikTok. China's Powerhouse App Is WeChat." In: *New York Times* (Sept. 2020). September 4.

network platforms globally.[82] Analytic firms have put the number of daily users of WeChat in the United States at more than 19 million. On average, WeChat users send 45 billion messages, spend 82 minutes on the platform, and open the app more than 10 times every day[83]. Recent studies of WeChat use by the Chinese diaspora across multiple countries have pointed to the platform's centrality in shaping diaspora identity politics and cultural navigation in their country of residence[84].

Because of path dependence and network effects, many diaspora use it to communicate among themselves but also stay in touch with their families and friends in China. Beyond news and communication, WeChat has become deeply integrated into daily activities, from mobile payments to e-commerce and food delivery. Not all users are politically engaged, but WeChat's central functionality for day-to-day interests, such as internship and job connections for overseas students, or travel and credit card promotions, encourages a captive user base and serves as a particularly effective platform for spreading information and ideas.

In addition to private chat groups, many WeChat users follow subscription accounts – which curate and post articles on a regular basis – as sources of news. These are essentially subscription channels with a chronological news feed, where users read articles that are curated or posted by the account moderator. Such posts can be either original content or, more frequently, reposts from other news sources. WeChat subscription accounts can be seen as similar to Facebook Pages; users can subscribe directly to the account, or alternatively encounter account content when contacts share links either in an individual or group chat or in their public feed[85].

Given the heterogeneity of Chinese diaspora communities, WeChat is more likely to be used by those who emigrated from Mainland China relatively recently or who have more active social and business ties with China. For example, Chinese students studying at U.S. universities or others who just moved for career opportunities are more likely to be WeChat users than someone from Hong Kong who emigrated to

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[82]By comparison, Twitter has 397 million and Facebook has 2.85 billion active users.

[83]Branka Vuleta. "WeChat Statistics." In: *99Firms* (2021).

[84]Wanning Sun and Haiqing Yu. "WeChat and the Chinese diaspora: Introduction." In: *WeChat and the Chinese Diaspora: Digital Transnationalism in the Era of China's Rise*. Ed. by Wanning Sun and Haiqing Yu. Routledge, 2022.

[85]Lu and Pan, "Capturing Clicks: How the Chinese Government Uses Clickbait to Compete for Visibility."

the United States decades ago or second-generation Chinese-Americans who grew up in the host country and may not use Mandarin Chinese as much in their daily lives. Government propaganda on WeChat is thus more likely to reach segments of the Chinese diaspora who are fluent in Chinese or maintain closer ties to China. At the same time, this is an important target audience – it represents a growing proportion of overseas Chinese that has been a focus of Beijing's diaspora management policies[86] and have also been rather public and vocal in their political mobilization, such as through student protests and rallies on university campuses.

As with many other Chinese technology apps, WeChat is subject to censorship and surveillance by the Chinese government. By not using end-to-end encryption, WeChat and its parent company Tencent have full access to private data and communications[87]. Government methods of information control apply to all China-registered accounts (set up with a mainland Chinese phone number) even if the account is later linked to a phone number outside of China. WeChat accounts registered to phone numbers outside of China are still subject to political surveillance, with their content used to bolster WeChat's domestic censorship system[88]. Additionally, the Chinese government's influence over WeChat extends beyond censorship to more proactive 'opinion guidance.' Subscription accounts, even those not overtly linked to the state, often covertly transmit pro-regime narratives and discourse[89]. Although there remains variation among WeChat media accounts in their level of objective coverage, they often have to tread carefully to avoid crossing government red lines[90]. The growing reliance on WeChat as an information platform has also exacerbated the narrowing diversity of diaspora-targeted news coverage and made the diasporic information environment more similar to that within Mainland China[91].

[86] Liu, "From "Sea Turtles" to "Grassroots Ambassadors": The Chinese Politics of Outbound Student Migration."

[87] Fergus Ryan, Audrey Fritz, and Daria Impiombato. "TikTok and WeChat: Curating and Controlling Global Information Flows." In: *Australian Strategic Policy Institute* (2020).

[88] Jeffrey Knockel et al. "We Chat, They Watch: How International Users Unwittingly Build up WeChat's Chinese Censorship Apparatus." In: *Citizen Lab Research Report, University of Toronto* 127 (2020).

[89] Jackson Paul Neagli. "Grassroots, Astroturf, or Something inBetween? Semi-Official WeChat Accounts as Covert Vectors of Party-State Influence in Contemporary China." In: *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* (2021).

[90] Fan Yang. "From ethnic media to ethno-transnational media: News-focused WeChat subscription accounts in Australia." In: *WeChat and the Chinese Diaspora: Digital Transnationalism in the Era of China's Rise*. Ed. by Wanning Sun and Haiqing Yu. Routledge, 2022.

[91] Josh Stenberg. "WeChat for Chinese speakers in Brazil: Towards integration with the PRC information environment." In: *WeChat and the Chinese Diaspora: Digital Transnationalism in the Era of China's Rise*. Ed. by Wanning Sun and Haiqing

Data

Collecting data from WeChat is no trivial task. This is largely due to the complexity and limitations of WeChat's API; as a result, there has been little analysis done on China's most active social media platform. In this section, we describe the challenges posed by collecting data from WeChat and how we used a new python package to overcome those challenges, acquiring an archive of close to 64,000 articles scraped from 14 subscription accounts (including eight government-linked accounts) frequented by Chinese diaspora in the United States.

The paucity of quantitative analysis of WeChat content is in a large part a function of its design. First, much user activity on WeChat occurs in private chat groups, which is inaccessible to any one who is not invited to participate. Second, WeChat no longer supports a web-client for individual accounts made after 2017, making it unfeasible to scrape using popular tools, such as Selenium or BeautifulSoup. Third, accessing the content generated by subscription accounts requires users to have a unique WeChat user account ID number, which is limited to one per unique phone number from Mainland China or Hong Kong. Finally, accounts engaged in scraping are likely to be blocked after some time, requiring the creation of a new account.[92]

To bypass these restrictions, we used a new python package `wechatarticles`.[93] This package simulates a desktop client when accessing WeChat content on official accounts. This process required three pieces of information: a *uin*, a unique WeChat user account ID associated with an individual phone number; a *biz*, a unique ID associated with a given subscription account; and a *key*, a randomly generated code obtained from a WeChat desktop client.[94] All three items were identified using a free version of Fiddler – software designed to log internet traffic – and a Windows 10 version of WeChat Desktop.

Yu. Routledge, 2022.

[92] To scrape the corpus used in this paper, we had to use four different accounts.

[93] wnma and Zhao Feng. *Wechat Articles Spider*. https://github.com/wnma3mz/wechat_Articles_spider. 2021.

[94] This key expires every few minutes. This means that researchers who wish to scrape WeChat must identify a new key for a subscription account at the moment they wish to begin scraping.

WeChat Account Selection

In our analysis, we focus on WeChat accounts targeted at Chinese diaspora in the United States. The United States presents an important host country case, given the relatively high political prominence accorded to China-related issues, the growing concerns over the role of diaspora in China's foreign influence activities, and the high levels of domestic polarization over domestic social issues, including racial discrimination. In addition, WeChat subscription accounts serve an important role as news sources for the broader diaspora community.

We selected 14 subscription accounts based on their volume of content generation and level of outreach to overseas Chinese in the United States. While unfortunately WeChat does not provide public data on the number of account followers, we triangulated our selection based on a list of prominent subscription accounts among surveyed U.S.-based Chinese WeChat users[95], consultation with members of the Chinese diaspora in the United States, and research on major diaspora news outlets in the United States. Our sample of WeChat accounts includes 8 government-linked and 6 private accounts. This allows us to compare the narrative framings of government propaganda with a control set of regular, privately-owned subscription accounts. Additionally, because salient issues are likely to vary across host countries, we choose only accounts that are specifically targeted toward overseas Chinese in the United States, which allows us to more accurately compare government propaganda to the broader diaspora information environment within the same political context.

Of the government-linked accounts in our sample, three are run by *US China Press*; two by *Sing Tao Daily*; two by *World Journal*; and one by *Here is America*. We define government-linked accounts as having political, financial, or ideological linkages with the Chinese regime. This includes not just strictly state-owned media, but also media outlets that exhibit varying degrees of CCP influence, from ownership by pro-government individuals or entities to ideological alignment with the Chinese government in an effort to gain market share among Mainland Chinese diaspora. To our knowledge, these eight ac-

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[95]Chi Zhang. "WeChatting American politics: Misinformation and political polarisation in the immigrant Chinese media ecosystem." In: *WeChat and the Chinese Diaspora*. Ed. by Wanning Sun and Haiqing Yu. Routledge, 2022, pp. 117–146.

counts represent the prominent government-linked diaspora media outlets (of which there are a very limited number) and thus capture much of the relevant media landscape in the United States. We chose to include multiple accounts from the same media outlet because some of them are targeted toward different geographical audiences, such as New York and San Francisco. Including such variation increases the external validity and representativeness of our analysis, and also improves the comparison with control accounts, some of which are also geographically targeted.

US China Press, *Sing Tao Daily*, and *World Journal* are three longstanding media outlets catering to overseas Chinese in the United States, and are generally considered to be linked in varying degrees to the Chinese Communist Party[96].[97] *US China Press* is owned by an entity affiliated with the government's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, its staff have often previously worked at Chinese state media outlets, and its reporting has been consistently in line with Chinese government narratives. *Sing Tao Daily* is the American subsidiary of a Hong Kong paper owned by a businessman who is a member of a Chinese political advisory body under the United Front system, and has been required by the U.S. government to register under the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA). *World Journal* has its origins with the pro-Nationalist party in Taiwan but has sought to cater to the growing Mainland Chinese diaspora in the United States, resulting in a shift to more pro-China coverage. *Here is America* is owned by an entity of the *Global Times*, a nationalistic news outlet with close ties to the Chinese government.

We use these government-linked accounts, rather than official state media accounts, as a baseline indicator of Chinese government narratives being propagated to overseas Chinese in the United States. This provides a valuable and valid measure of home country narratives for at least two reasons. First, these accounts are likely to have broader reach compared with official state-run media accounts such as *People's Daily Overseas* or *China News Service*, as individuals are more likely to be skeptical of and less likely to follow perceived government mouthpieces. Established diaspora media outlets in the United

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[96]Duzhe Mei. "How China's Government is Attempting to Control Chinese Media in America." In: *Jamestown Foundation China Brief* 1.10 (2001); Larry Diamond and Orville Schell. *China's Influence and American Interests*. Tech. rep. Hoover Institution, 2019.

[97]Another diaspora publication, *Ming Pao Daily News*, does not appear to have an active WeChat account.

States are more likely to be seen as credible information sources. Examining narratives in plausibly influential accounts adds external validity to our analysis of Chinese government propaganda. Second, such government-linked accounts are run by companies with at least some financial interests in making these outlets commercially viable and appealing to diaspora audiences. Having a similar business context as our control group of privately-run accounts means that any observed differences in the scope and tone of media content are more likely to be a function of government strategic narratives.

As a control, we analyze six privately-run WeChat accounts. To increase the representativeness and validity of our control sample, we included multiple private accounts that vary in target audience, content, and style. This includes (i) accounts that are popular among the diaspora as general sources of social and cultural news – i.e. not overtly political in its origins – (e.g. *US College Daily*, *Dealmoon*, *Insight China*); and (ii) accounts that are targeted toward major diaspora communities in large cities (*Chinese in New York*, *Chinese in Atlanta*, and *Houston Online*). Many of these private accounts should in fact present a hard test for observing heightened government framings of diaspora-targeted race and violence issues, because their audience and content focus are oriented toward major geographically-concentrated Chinese diaspora communities that have borne the brunt of anti-Asian violence, such as in New York City or Atlanta. Additionally, some of these private accounts, such as US College Daily, are known for their sensationalist and nationalistic content (but apparently driven by individual editorial decisions and a desire for garnering clicks),[98] which also makes it a hard test for observing government use of wedge narratives.

Table 1 provides the list of subscription accounts and the number of posts by year. We limit our analysis to the years 2019 - 2021, as a plurality of accounts began producing articles in late 2018 or early 2019.[99]

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[98]See e.g. Han Zhang, "The "Post-Truth" publication where Chinese students in America get their news, *The New Yorker*, August 19, 2019.

[99]We were unable to obtain data for the period of September to December 2021 for two accounts – *Chinese in New York* and *Chinese in Atlanta* – due to changes made to the WeChat API. Our findings remained unchanged when excluding these two subscription accounts from our analysis.

Table 1: WeChat Subscription Account Metadata

Subscription Account Name		Articles by Year		
English	Chinese	2021	2020	2019
Government				
Here is America	这里是美国	1342	1619	1850
SingTao Daily	星条探索	2836	2775	705
SingTao NY	今日美东	2936	2987	104
US China Press LA	LA 早知道	516	501	610
US China Press NY	瞧纽约	1237	1267	93
US China Press SF	湾区在线	605	548	672
World Journal	世界北美通	1827	2146	817
World Journal SF	湾区看世界	1525	1555	1591
Independent				
Chinese in Atlanta	亚特兰大华人资讯网	1075	858	1126
Chinese in New York	纽约华人资讯网	1890	2783	1390
Dealmoon	北美省钱快报	1181	193	3060
Houston Online	休斯顿在线	1475	1313	1121
Insight China	INSIGHT 世界	1874	2066	2018
US College Daily	北美留学生日报	2055	1789	2185

Methods

In this section, we describe how we implement embeddings towards measuring our outcomes of interest. Additionally, we describe the empirical strategies that we use to test our hypotheses.

Word embeddings are a class of unsupervised machine learning algorithms that have been growing in popularity in the social sciences due to their ability to quantitatively represent the semantic meaning of words and concepts as they appear in a given corpus of text. These algorithms take as inputs ordered tokens in a text corpus, which are then used to estimate numeric vectors for each word. These word vectors contain information about the contexts in which words occur and have been interpreted as containing semantic information. This semantic information has been used in the past by other social scientists to identify racial and sexual bias in literature[100] as well as compare how words are used differently across

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[100]Nikhil Garg et al. "Word Embeddings Quantify 100 Years of Gender and Ethnic Stereotypes." In: *PNAS* 115.16 (2018), pp. 635–644. DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1720347115. arXiv: 1711.08412.

corpora[101]. When applied to media framing, word embeddings offer a key advantage in allowing for semantic relationships present in text to be assigned continuous quantitative values that can be used to test hypotheses[102].

To test our hypothesis, we require a measure of framing that allows us to compare how attributes, such as racism and violence, are associated with objects, such as Chinese diaspora, across different WeChat accounts. To this end, we use a word embeddings-based methodology showcased by Chester (2024) to measure propaganda.[103] In his application, he identified a set attribute and object dictionaries and assessed how semantically similar they were across a propagandized and non-propagandized text corpus. Similarly, we select a set of dictionary terms representing an object and attributes and use fitted word embeddings models to identify the degree to which they appear in similar contexts across a set of corpora: articles from WeChat subscription accounts.[104]

For our first set of hypotheses, our object is Chinese *diaspora* and our attributes are *violence* and *racism*, while for our second set of hypotheses our objects are the names of countries – for instance, United States (美国) – and our attributes are *chaos* and *corruption*.

In the first stage, we divide our corpus of text into subscription account subcorpora.[105] On each subcorpus, we fit a skip-gram word embedding model[106]. This model was chosen because it is a well-documented technology that has been found to work well in a variety of circumstances, particularly with

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[101]Luchen Tan et al. "Lexical Comparison Between Wikipedia and Twitter Corpora by Using Word Embeddings." In: *Proceedings of the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics and the 7th International Joint Conference on Natural Language Processing*. Beijing: Association for Computational Linguistics, 2015, pp. 657–661.

[102]Chester, "Framing Democracy: Characterizing China's Negative Legitimation Propaganda Strategy using Word Embeddings."

[103]Chester, "Framing Democracy: Characterizing China's Negative Legitimation Propaganda Strategy using Word Embeddings."

[104]We considered alternative methodologies, such as supervised machine learning and topic models. However, each had limitations that made them less appealing compared to word embeddings. Supervised machine learning would have been costly to implement, as we would need to hire confederates to create training and validation data. As for topic models, while they are an incredible tool for data exploration and content analysis, word embeddings are better suited to identifying associations between pre-determined objects and attributes of interest.

[105]For our analysis of how regime type impacts subscription account behavior, further divide corpora into subscription-account year subcorpora. This was done because we have data on the annual level for regime type from V-Dem.

[106]Tomas Mikolov et al. "Efficient estimation of word representations in vector space." In: *1st International Conference on Learning Representations, ICLR 2013 - Workshop Track Proceedings* (2013), pp. 1–12. arXiv: 1301.3781.

smaller data sets. It is also computationally efficient, which is particularly helpful given that we generate bootstrapped estimates of word similarity. The model was fit with a ten-word window and 300 embedding dimensions per the best practices described by Spirling and Rodriguez (2021).[107]

Next, we identified a set of topically related dictionaries using a tool highlighted in Chester (2024): the *conclust* algorithm.[108] This algorithm is designed to extract conceptually similar terms from a corpus with a small number of seed words. In this case, we used this algorithm to supplement relevant terms for our concepts of interest: Chinese *diaspora* in America, *racism*, *violence*, *chaos*, and *corruption*. With this approach, we identified a total of 97 relevant terms, including 9 terms related to Chinese diaspora, 8 terms related to racism, 16 terms related to violence, 39 related to chaos, and 25 related to corruption (see Tables A4 and A5 in the online appendix for the full set of terms used). Additionally, we manually compiled a list of 259 terms that represent country names used in both simplified and traditional Chinese.

One potential concern is that associations we identify between dictionaries are not particular to those concepts of interest. For instance, it could be the case that Chinese media highlights racism and violence as targeting all ethnic groups, not just diaspora. To account for this possibility, we generated dictionaries that we would use as placebo objects and attributes. For the identity wedge analysis, we examine terms that represent Caucasians and African Americans, to determine whether diaspora-targeted racism and violence is disproportionately the focus of government affiliated media. For our cross-national analysis on political wedge narratives, we use a dictionary of sports terms as a placebo to determine whether democracies are distinctively framed using negative attributes.[109]

In the final stage, we estimate the cosine similarity between the word vectors of each pairing of words associated with our object and attributes, using our created dictionaries as well as word embedding models fit on bootstrapped samples from subscription account-year subcorpora. For example, for *Here is*

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[107] Arthur Spirling and Pedro L Rodriguez. "Word Embeddings What works, what doesn't, and how to tell the difference for applied research." In: *Journal of Politics* (2021), pp. 1–56.

[108] Patrick J. Chester. "Embedded Lexica: Extracting Keywords from Unlabeled Corpora using Word Embeddings." 2024.

[109] We then removed those terms that were observed infrequently in our corpus – missing in at least 10 percent of our subcorpora – to ensure that the differences observed between subcorpora were driven by differences in framing, not differences in terminology used. These rare terms can be found in Tables A5 and A4 in the Appendix.

America's 2019 posts, we would fit a word embeddings model that would generate word vectors for the object word "diaspora" (华裔) and the attribute word "discrimination" (歧视). We would then calculate the cosine similarity between these two-word vectors for this pairing of words, which would give us a number in the range of $[-1, 1]$, with 1 indicating that the words always co-occur and a -1 indicating that they are orthogonal to one another.

We use bootstrapped subcorpora sampling to address the inherent stochasticity of word embedding models, including the skip-gram model. Antoniak and Mimno and Rodman argue that this approach also reduces the influence of documents that may be particularly long or have content that falls outside of the norm of the subcorpus.[110] For each model iteration, a number of articles equal to the size of the subcorpus are drawn with replacement from each respective subcorpus. These articles are used to fit a skip-gram word embeddings model, which then is used to compute similarities between pairs of words from each object and attribute.

Empirical Strategy

To test our hypotheses, we use OLS regressions with fixed effects. Our first hypothesis (H1) examines the use of identity wedge narratives to frame racism and violence as targeted at the Chinese diaspora. Accordingly, we expect that government accounts will show higher levels of similarity between diaspora and racism and violence terms relative to non-government accounts. To test this hypothesis, we estimate the following model:

$$\mathtt{Y}_{ijp} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathtt{G}_p + \eta_i + \phi_j + \epsilon_{ijp} \tag{1}$$

In this model, $\mathtt{Y}_{ijp}$ represents the cosine similarity between terms i and j for a given subscription account, p. The term $\mathtt{G}_p$ represents government affiliated accounts. The remaining parameters control for the terms used in our *diaspora* (η_i), and *racism*, and *violence* dictionaries (ϕ_j).

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[110]Maria Antoniak and David Mimno. "Evaluating the Stability of Embedding-based Word Similarities." In: *Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics* 6 (2018), pp. 107–119; Emma Rodman. "A Timely Intervention: Tracking the Changing Meanings of Political Concepts with Word Vectors." In: *Political Analysis* 28 (2020), pp. 87–111.

Given Hypothesis 1, we expect that β_1 will be positive and statistically significant for both the *diaspora-racism* and *diaspora-violence* object-attribute pairings. This would mean that government-affiliated accounts generally promote a narrative that highlights anti-Asian violence and racism.

For Hypothesis 2, we predict that countries that have democratic institutions will be framed as being chaotic (H2a) and corrupt (H2b). To parameterize democratic institutions, we utilize data from Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), which is measured at the year level. To exploit this temporal variation, we conduct this analysis at the level of the subscription account-year. The model we utilize is described below:

$$Y_{ijpt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 G_p R_{it} + \beta_2 G_p + \beta_3 R_{it} + \theta_t + \gamma_p + \eta_i + \phi_j + \epsilon_{ijpt} \tag{2}$$

The key difference between Equation 1 and Equation 2 is that our estimand, β_1, represents the interaction between government account affiliation, G, and regime type, R. The latter is operationalized using the V-Dem Liberal Democracy index. This index ranges between 0 and 1, where lower values indicating authoritarianism and higher values liberalism. As our interaction involves a time-varying variable, we also include publication and time fixed effects, θ_t and γ_p, respectively.

Our hypotheses indicate that we should expect β_1 to be positive, which would tell us that the more democratic a given country is, the more Chinese government accounts will associate it with chaos and corruption.

Findings

In this section, we examine both descriptive and statistical evidence and compare them with our hypotheses. Figure 1 shows how the normalized term frequencies of our dictionaries vary over time across government-affiliated and independent subscription accounts. In general, the government and regular accounts display roughly parallel trends in their coverage of these topics. This suggests overall good comparability across accounts, and also that non-government accounts devote considerable attention to broader political issues of interest in the host society.

However, there are some noteworthy differences in coverage patterns across government and non-governmental accounts. First, we can see that the government saw a spike in coverage of chaos dictionary terms following January 2021 that persists into July of that year. This is consistent with a strategy highlighting political chaos following the January 6th protests in the United States. When we compare coverage of corruption, we see that government-affiliated accounts cover this topic more frequently compared to independent media accounts. However, aside from a spike in early 2019, the trend in corruption coverage by government accounts is largely parallel to that of independent accounts.

Coverage of racism and violence occurred at broadly similar levels across all accounts over the course of the period of 2019 – 2020. However, there is a spike of coverage of these topics, particularly among government-affiliated accounts, during the first half of 2021. This appears to be consistent with a spike in anti-Asian racist assaults that occurred that same year (see Figure A5). We also see coverage of Chinese diaspora spike in the beginning of 2021, at similar levels across government and non-government accounts. This suggests that while government-affiliated accounts and independent accounts show a similar degree of interest in diaspora, the former uses more language describing violence and racism. Overall, this is consistent with a framing strategy that highlights anti-Asian racism.

Figure 1: Dictionary Term Prevalence over Time
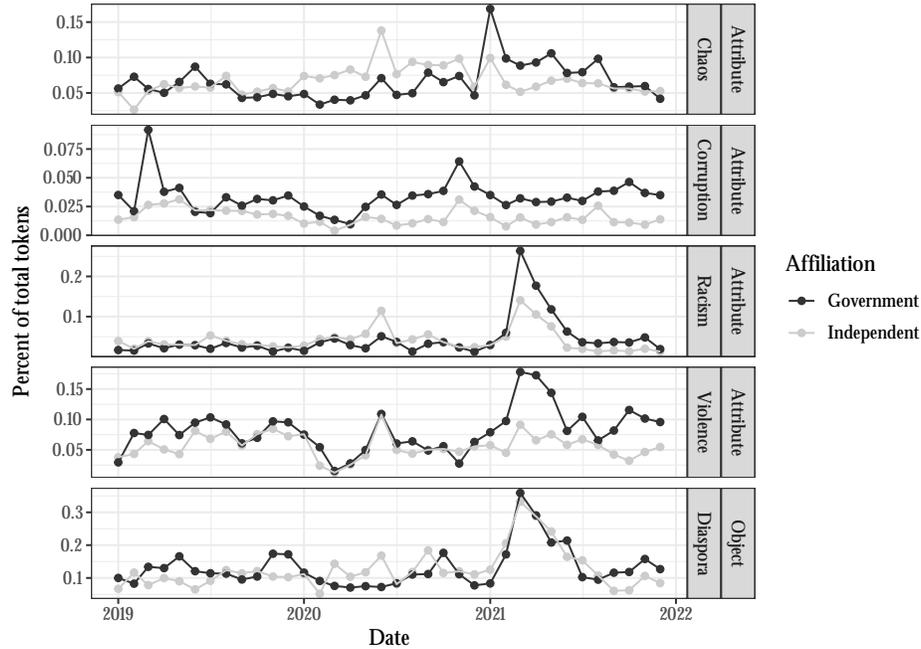
Note: Lines represent percent of tokens produced by subscription accounts for a given month that belong to particular object and attribute dictionaries.

Identity Wedge: Racism and Violence

While a useful illustration of overall coverage trends, individual dictionary frequencies say little about how they are associated with other dictionaries of interest in the text itself. For a more precise test of our hypotheses, we assess the degree to which concepts of interest are associated with one another in the WeChat text corpus using our word embedding-derived similarity scores.

To examine identity wedge narratives in Chinese government propaganda, Figure 2 shows the average cosine similarity between concept pairs across subscription accounts, grouped by government affiliation. Higher cosine similarity reflects a greater association of our chosen attributes – *racism* and *violence* – with the chosen object, the Chinese *diaspora*. This can be interpreted as a greater degree of framing racism and violence as targeting the Chinese diaspora. For each attribute-object combination, the dotted lines represent the mean cosine similarity for all government accounts (in blue) and all independent accounts (in orange).

Figure 2: Association between Chinese Diaspora and Attributes by Affiliation and Account
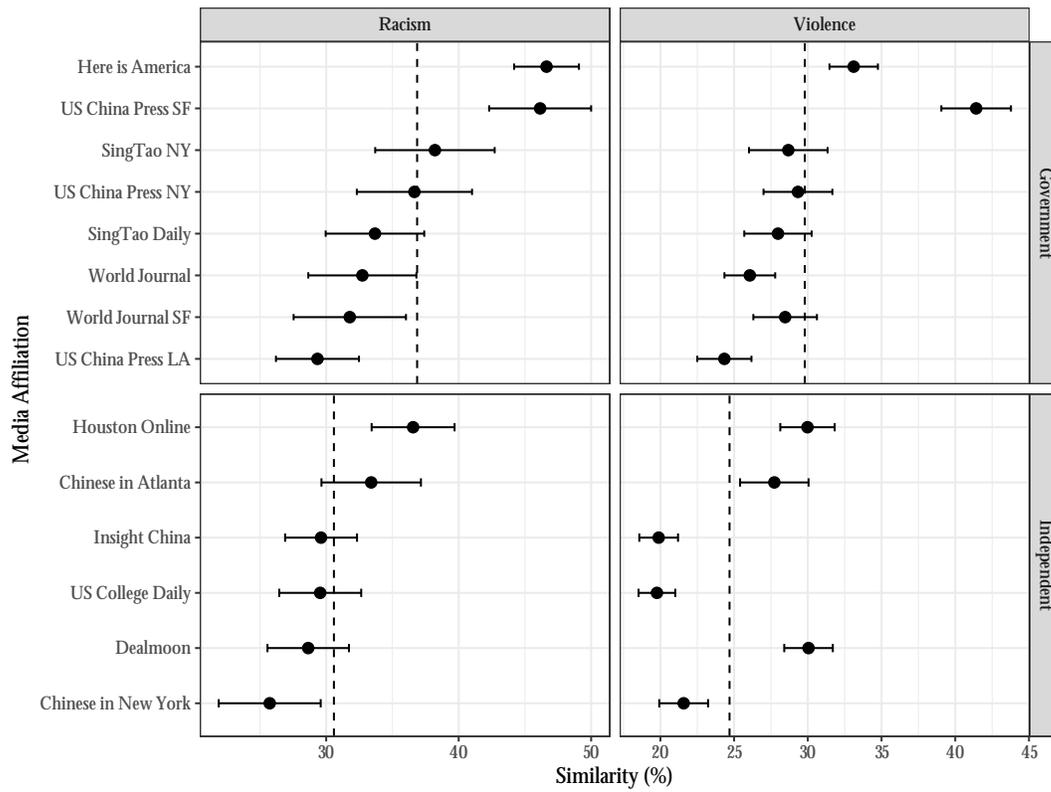
Note: Points represent the average cosine similarity scores between the concept pairs diaspora-racism and diaspora-violence for each subscription account. Similarly, intervals represent the range of similarity scores that contain 95% of object-attribute term pairs for a each subscription account. Vertical lines represent the average average similarity scores across government and independent accounts.

Overall, posts by government-linked accounts show a substantially higher cosine similarity between *diaspora* and *racism* as well as between *diaspora* and *violence*, compared to privately-run subscription accounts. The average government account had a cosine similarity of around 37% and 30% for *racism* and *violence* respectively, compared to 31% and 25% for the average independent account. This pattern is exemplified by two government-affiliated accounts, *US China Press: San Francisco* and *Here is America*, in which the cosine similarity between the concepts of *Racism* and *Diaspora* are approximately 46%. In contrasat, accounts that were unaffiliated with the government, such as *Insight China* and *Chinese in New York*, made up a disproportionate number of accounts with low levels of similarity between negative attributes and *Diaspora*. This is consistent with our prediction that government-propagated narratives

frame issues of race and violence more explicitly in terms of anti-Asian discrimination.

Are these differences in framing distinct to the Chinese diaspora or do government-linked accounts frame other racial groups in a similar manner? To address this question, we calculate the similarity between terms from our two placebo objects – *white* and *black* – and our *racism* and *violence* attributes. We then average the similarity scores of subscription accounts by affiliation with the Chinese government within each concept pair. Figure 3 shows us how average similarity scores differ between government and independent accounts across ethnic groups. In general, both non-government and government accounts displayed higher associations between racism/violence and the two placebo ethnic groups. While government-affiliated accounts have slightly higher similarity scores, the difference with non-government accounts was smaller for the placebo ethnic groups than with coverage of the Chinese diaspora.

Figure 3: Association between Ethnicity and Attributes by Affiliation
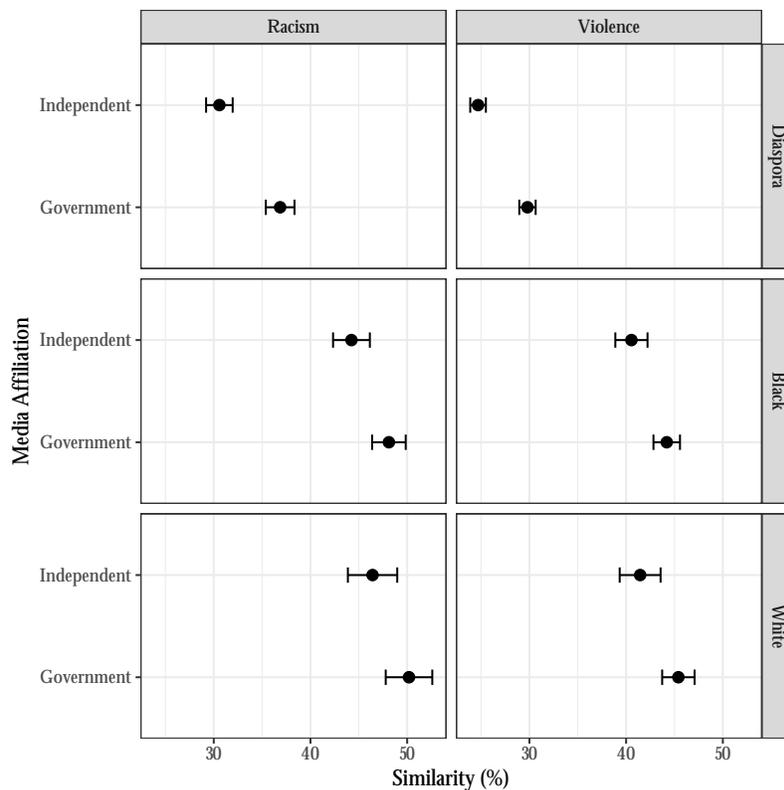
Note: Points represent the average cosine similarity scores between the concepts of diaspora and racism and violence across all object-attribute term pairs for independent and government affiliated subscription accounts. Similarly, intervals represent the range of similarity scores that contain 95% of object-attribute term pairs for a given group.

To test whether government-affiliated accounts have a general preference for highlighting ethnic conflict and racism versus amplifying such framings for the Chinese diaspora, we then run an OLS model with dictionary fixed effects and control variables. We examine whether *diaspora* are framed with more language associated with racism and violence compared to *white* and *black* groups. If our hypothesis is correct, we would expect the coefficient associated with the interaction term *Government* to be statistically significant and positive.

Table 2: Effect of Government Affiliation on Racism and Violence Framing over Ethnicity

| | *Similarity (%)* | | | | | |
| | Racism | | | Violence | | |
	Diaspora (1)	White (2)	Black (3)	Diaspora (4)	White (5)	Black (6)
Government	3.64***	1.02	-0.71	1.83**	0.41	-0.93
	(0.87)	(1.60)	(1.33)	(0.77)	(0.83)	(1.08)
ln Frequency 1	-2.82***	-5.30***	-3.15***	-3.29***	-5.73***	-4.41***
	(0.41)	(1.09)	(0.64)	(0.24)	(0.59)	(0.38)
ln Frequency 2	-1.18***	-0.66	-3.14***	-1.96***	-1.66*	-3.03***
	(0.25)	(1.06)	(0.89)	(0.37)	(0.93)	(0.77)
Statistics						
Observations	489	196	286	963	386	567
Fixed effects						
Dictionary FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 White robust standard-errors are clustered on the attribute dictionary. Dependent variable is cosine similarity between respective object and attribute dictionaries. Controls for dictionary frequency are shown. Unit of analysis is the object-attribute word pair, which varies according to the object and attribute dictionary size.

Table 2 shows the output of these models. In both Models 1 and 4, *Diaspora* are more likely to be associated with *violence* and *racism* sentiment by government-affiliated accounts, compared to *white* and *black* groups in the WeChat text corpus. As expected, this effect is positive and statistically significant at a 0.01 level for the *racism* attribute. We find that *racism* terms are on average 3.64% more similar to *diaspora* terms for Government affiliated accounts relative to independent accounts. For the *violence* attribute, we see a similar positive association of 1.90% between *violence* and *diaspora* that is significant at a 0.05 level. In contrast, we see that there is no statistically significant difference in how government affiliated and

independent accounts associate *violence* and *racism* terms with black and white identity groups. Overall, this evidence is consistent with our first hypothesis that government accounts amplify framings of racism and violence as being targeted at the Chinese diaspora.

Political Wedge Narratives

Next, we examine the use of political wedge narratives by government-affiliated accounts – that is, framing democracies in a negative light to decrease diaspora affinity with democratic host countries. We predict that government-affiliated accounts will cover more democratic countries as chaotic and corrupt, compared to independent accounts. To test H2, we analyze how government-affiliated and independent accounts vary their framing of countries according to their regime type over time. Additionally, we perform three-way fixed effects regression to determine whether our hypotheses have statistical support.

In our analysis, we further include a placebo concept to ensure that differences in framing behavior that we observe between government and independent accounts for different levels of democracy are particular to our attributes of interest. We use the topic *sports* as a placebo, as there is no clear strategic reason for the Chinese government to associate sports news more heavily with democracies than non-democracies.

Figure 4: Concept Similarity by Affiliation Regime Type
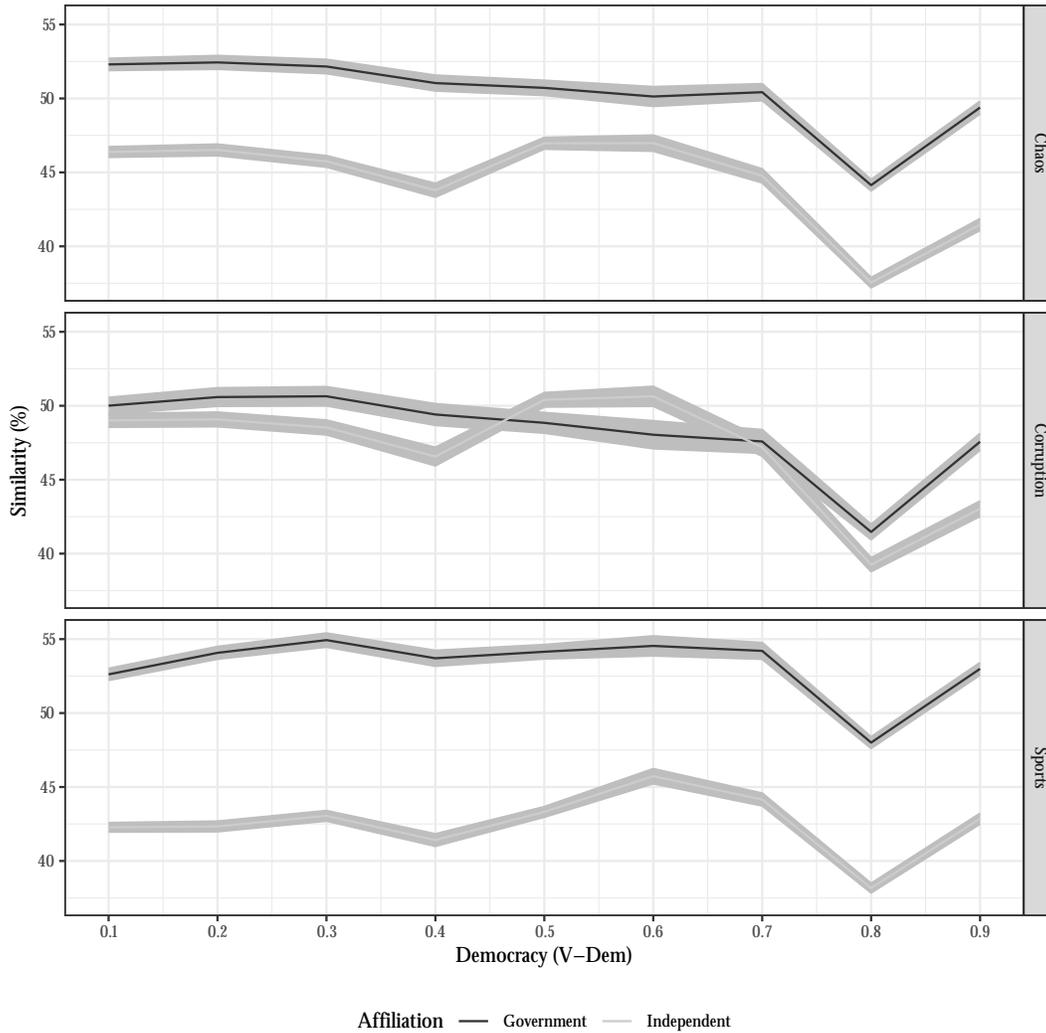
Note: Lines represent the distribution containing 95% of of similarity scores between country and attribute dictionaries at various levels of democracy.

Figure 4 shows the average similarity of *chaos, corruption,* and *sports* for government versus independent accounts, across countries at each level of regime type, as quantified by V-Dem's libdem democracy metric. Lower values on the x-axis correspond with autocracy, while higher levels correspond with liberal democracy.

We see meaningful differences in how government versus independent accounts apply chaos and cor-

ruption frames to countries across regime types. Compared to the average independent account, the average government-affiliated account portrays highly democratic countries as more chaotic and corrupt. Such differences in framing are particularly marked when covering countries with V-Dem scores over 0.8. In contrast, government and non-government accounts are more similar in their coverage of countries categorized as hybrid regimes (e.g. with V-Dem scores around 0.5-0.7). This latter finding is broadly in line with literature that points to greater political instability in hybrid regimes[111]. As for the placebo topic of sports, while government accounts tend to have higher average cosine similarity scores, these differences with non-government accounts remain roughly constant – we do not see any clear differences in how government versus independent accounts portray countries at varying levels of democracy.[112]

Overall, these findings are consistent with our hypotheses, as we see that government-affiliated accounts tend to show democratic countries as more chaotic and corrupt than do independent accounts. This difference is largely concentrated in more democratic regimes, indicating a desire to portray liberal democracies in a negative light.

We then formally test Hypotheses 2a and 2b using three-way fixed-effects regressions, the results of which are in shown in Table 3. With Models 1 through 3, we show the coefficient estimates described in Equation 2 where we examine the degree to which government-affiliated and independent accounts differ in their framing of countries across different levels of regime type. The coefficient most relevant to our hypothesis is *Govt. Acct. × Democracy*, which we expect to be statistically significant and positive for Models 1 and 2 (*chaos* and *corruption* respectively), but not for Model 3 (the placebo concept *sports*). All models shown include subscription account, year, and dictionary fixed effects, as well as controls for term frequency.

Looking at Model 1, as a country moves from total autocracy to full democracy (0 to 1 on the libdem scale), government-run accounts show a 2.86% higher degree of similarity between chaos and countries,

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[111] K. Skrede Gleditsch and A. Ruggeri. "Political opportunity structures, democracy, and civil war." In: *Journal of Peace Research* 47.3 (2010), pp. 299–310. ISSN: 0022-3433.

[112] Figure A6 in the Appendix shows loess fitted lines representing the moving average cosine similarity scores at the individual account level. We see similar differential trends in framing, with independent accounts showing a sharper decline in their association of liberal democracies with chaos and corruption.

relative to independent accounts. This effect is statistically significant at a 0.01 level. In Model 2, regime type has an even larger effect: government accounts show over 4% higher similarity between the corruption frame and liberal democracies relative to autocracies. This effect is statistically significant at a 0.01 level. Both of these findings support the argument that government accounts are more likely to amplify negative framings of democracy.

Finally, Model 3 examines whether government-affiliated accounts differ from independent accounts in their framing of democracies with sports terms. As expected for the placebo topic, the coefficient estimate for *Govt. Acct. × Democracy* for Model 3 is substantively small and not statistically significant. This suggests that there is little meaningful difference in how government-affiliated and independent accounts cover international sports across regime types.

Overall, we find both descriptive and statistical support for Hypotheses 2a and 2b, indicating that the Chinese government attempts to use propaganda to shape diasporas' perceptions of democratic political systems.

Robustness checks

We also examine the performance of our models under various different model specifications and parameterizations. These include the use of alternative error specifications and using alternative measures of democracy. Overall, our findings appear to be robust to alternative model specifications and placebo tests.

We run alternative standard error specifications for our regression analysis. This is to address concerns that the presence of correlated errors within dictionaries, subscription accounts, and years means that the iid assumptions of OLS regression are violated in our data; while we cluster according to country for our analyses of political wedge narratives, errors are also likely to be correlated at other levels, including the attribute dictionary and subscription account levels. Additionally, we included wild bootstrap variations on each level of clustering, to ensure that the variable number of clusters across these levels were not

Table 3: Effect of Regime Type on Framing by Attribute

| | Similarity with Country Dictionary (%) | | |
	Chaos (1)	Corruption (2)	Sports (3)
Government Accounts	-0.11	-7.18***	-3.19***
	(1.05)	(0.98)	(0.74)
Democracy (vdem)	-0.42	1.40	5.59
	(7.71)	(8.70)	(5.98)
Govt. Acct. x Democracy	2.79***	3.86***	0.15
	(0.96)	(1.02)	(0.82)
ln Frequency 1	-1.58***	-1.96***	-2.28***
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
ln Frequency 2	-3.57***	-2.31***	-1.71***
	(0.09)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Statistics			
Observations	93453	48636	97180
Fixed effects			
Subscription Account	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dictionary	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 White robust standard-errors clustered on country in parentheses. Dependent variable is cosine similarity between country and respective attribute dictionaries. Controls for dictionary term frequency are shown. Unit of analysis is the object-attribute word pair, which varies according to the object and attribute dictionary size.

biasing our error estimates in any way[113].

For our identity wedge analysis, we examine whether five separate error specifications affect our findings: our baseline clustered errors at the country level, another with errors clustered at the attribute level, and finally a model with White heterosketastic-corrected errors (see Table A7 in Appendix). We see little difference between standard and bootstrapped clustered standard errors.[114] Similarly, for the political wedge analysis, we evaluated Models 1 - 2 from Table 3 with the same set of standard error specifications to

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[113]A. Colin Cameron, Jonah B. Gelbach, and Douglas L. Miller. "Bootstrap-based improvements for inference with clustered errors." In: *Review of Economics and Statistics* 90.3 (2008), pp. 414–427. ISSN: 00346535. DOI: 10.1162/rest.90.3.414.

[114]Clustering at the object level was not included due to the small number of ethnic terms used in this study.

see if our findings were dependent on clustering upon a particular dictionary (see Figure A8 in Appendix for details). As before, we find that no matter which standard error specification is used, our estimates remain statistically significant at the 95% level.

Finally, we examine whether our results for the political wedge analysis are robust to the use of alternative measures of democracy from the V-Dem project. The scale utilized in our baseline model is designed to measure the degree to which a country is a liberal democracy. At the same time, the V-Dem project has produced alternative measures of democracy quality, including the polyarchy and deliberative democracy measures. Tables A9 and A10 replicate our main findings with these alternative democracy measures. We see that in every case there is a significant difference between how government-affiliated and independent media accounts associate chaos and corruption frames with democratic countries at at least a 0.05 level, in the direction we expect. As before, there is no clear difference between government and independent accounts' use of the sports frame.

Overall, our analyses provide a picture of China's diaspora propaganda strategy that is largely consistent with use of wedge narratives, both identity and political, to divide and isolate diaspora communities from the host country. Government accounts strategically frame racial discrimination and violence as being targeted specifically at the diaspora, and also frame democratic political institutions as chaotic and corrupt. Such propaganda could lead to decreased diaspora identification with and participation in host society and politics, while potentially increasing affinity with the homeland and support for the home government.

Qualitative Analysis: How the Chinese Government Frames Diaspora-Targeted Discrimination

To further validate our findings, we did a close qualitative reading of two different samples of WeChat posts, with a focus on the Chinese government's identity wedge narratives.

First, for each account in our analysis, we read the article with the highest co-occurrence of *diaspora* with each of the concepts *race* and *violence*, giving a total of 28 articles. By examining the actual content

of these articles, we verified that our interpretation of the framing results was accurate: that articles with high co-occurrence of our concepts of interest were indeed discussing racism and violence in the United States as explicitly targeting those of Asian and Chinese descent.

Highest-ranking articles on diaspora-targeted racism discussed in detail many instances of Asian-based discrimination in the United States. These posts covered not only contemporary events such as referring to Covid as the 'China virus' (*SingTao NY*) or university posters accusing Chinese students of being agents of the Chinese government as part of a 'China threat' discourse (*Insight China*), but also emphasized the long history of racism against Asians, especially Chinese, in the United States, with Asians seen as 'forever foreigners' and a 'yellow peril' (*World Journal*; *SingTao Daily*; *US College Daily*). Articles also emphasized how Asian-targeted discrimination was often overlooked in discussions of systemic racism by U.S. government and society because of the model minority myth (*Chinese in New York*).

The highest-ranking articles on diaspora-targeted violence also followed similar trends in coverage. Many articles featured reporting of specific anti-Asian hate crimes (*Chinese in NY*; *Here is America*), cited statistics of Asians being disproportionate victims of robberies and property crime (*US China Press SF*; *SingTao Daily*), or covered general rising trends of hate crimes in major cities and nationally in the United States (*US China Press LA*; *US College Daily*). Some articles also covered rallies against anti-Asian hate and called for Asians to demand equal treatment (*Houston Online*; *Insight China*).

Second, we verified that our cosine similarity scores were a valid measure of the differing extents to which an account framed ethnic discrimination and violence in the context of the Chinese diaspora. We manually read twenty randomly-selected articles from each of three accounts: *Here is America* (the government-linked account) with a very high similarity score, *Chinese in New York* as an account with very low scores, and *US College Daily* as an account with intermediate scores.

We found that, relative to the other two accounts, *Here is America* employed more diaspora-targeted framings of anti-Asian discrimination and violence. The government account extensively discussed the occurrence of anti-Asian hate crimes, including issues of how Asians wearing masks would be the targets of harassment, or how a German chef said that his restaurant would not welcome Chinese people during

Covid. *Here is America* also frequently referenced deep-rooted legacies of racism in the United States and the West. For example, sampled articles mentioned the ethnically-targeted murder of Vincent Chin, the *Wall Street Journal*'s recent headline calling China "Asia's sick man," and criticized the Western media and fashion industries for exotifying stereotypes of Asian looks and "uglifying Chinese people" in order to perpetuated "yellow peril" narratives.

Such government rhetoric differed sharply from the coverage by the account *Chinese in New York*, which had a few articles about anti-Asian hate crimes and educational discrimination, but tended to feature a broader range of topics on Covid statistics, New York City mayoral elections, the Boeing 777 Max failure, and a story on a Chinese student studying in Pennsylvania poisoning his African-American roommate's food with heavy metals. The third account, *US College Daily*, had a moderate amount of coverage on Chinese-targeted discrimination, such as a Duke University professor who sent a discriminatory email telling Chinese students to speak only English in the lab. But a fair number of its articles were not about anti-Asian racism specifically but more general discussions of race issues and anti-China politics. For instance, the account discussed whether Darlie toothpaste, a very popular brand in China, was racist, as well as how foreign brands such as Dolce & Gabbana or Coach were disrespecting China's sovereignty by not including Taiwan and Hong Kong in cartographical depictions.

Conclusion

Drawing on a newly-scraped corpus of WeChat articles, we find evidence consistent with our theory that the Chinese government strategically amplifies identity wedge narratives of racial discrimination and ethnic violence as being targeted at the diaspora, and also amplifies political wedge narratives of democratic host countries being more chaotic and corrupt. While such issues may already be present in host countries, diaspora-targeted wedge narratives serve to highlight and exacerbate such divides. This tactic has the potential to drive a wedge between diaspora communities and host societies, serving home government goals of increasing diaspora loyalty to the homeland, which can help to ensure internal stability as well as promote strategic interests overseas.

The use of identity and political wedge narratives has important related but distinct strategic implications. Identity wedges have the potential to exacerbate social and cultural divisions in host countries, while political wedges could aggravate ideological divisions and beliefs about political systems and governance. Used in conjunction, these two kinds of wedge narratives may have a concerted and destabilizing impact on the social and political cohesion of host countries.

An important next step is to examine the degree to which such strategic propaganda narratives actually influence the diaspora. In other words, when home governments employ wedge narratives, does such propaganda actually work? Future research could examine how effective wedge narratives are in altering diaspora attitudes and behavior, and how propaganda persuasiveness may vary depending on subgroup attributes such as the level of host country integration or individual political beliefs.

The findings in this paper suggest that China is exploiting and exacerbating salient political and social cleavages in the United States by strategically covering events where diaspora are targets of hostility. Given the growing Chinese-American and Asian-American populations, such an authoritarian wedge narrative strategy could have major implications for political beliefs, voting behavior, and the cohesion of a multicultural society. While different in its targets, this has strong parallels with Russian disinformation campaigns seeking to weaken confidence in the U.S. political system and Western democracy more generally. Diaspora-targeted propaganda appears to be part of a broader authoritarian toolkit of foreign influence and interference, especially in an era where geopolitical competition is increasingly occurring in the information domain.

Divide to Conquer

Online Appendix

Dictionaries for Word Embedding Analysis

Table A4: Dictionaries for Identity Framing Analysis

Term	Definition
African Americans (Object)	
黑人	black people
非裔	people of African descent
Black Lives Matter	Black Lives Matter movement
Diaspora (Object)	
亚裔	of Asian descent
华人	ethnic Chinese person or people
华侨	overseas Chinese (in a restricted sense) Chinese emigrant who still retains Chinese nationality
华裔	ethnic Chinese non-Chinese citizen of Chinese ancestry
海外华人	overseas Chinese
Racism (Attribute)	
仇恨	to hate hatred enmity hostility
偏见	prejudice
对立	to oppose to set sth against to be antagonistic to antithetical relative opposite opposing diametrical
敌意	enmity hostility
歧视	to discriminate against discrimination
种族	race ethnicity
种族歧视	racial discrimination racism

(Continued on Next Page...)

Table A4: Dictionaries for Identity Framing Analysis *(continued)*

Term	Definition
Violence (Attribute)	
受害人	victim
受害者	casualty victim those injured and wounded
大屠杀	massacre Holocaust
屠杀	to massacre massacre bloodbath carnage
强暴	violent to rape
无辜	innocent innocence not guilty (law)
暴力	violence force violent
暴行	savage act outrage atrocity
杀人	homicide to murder to kill (a person)
杀害	to murder
罪行	crime offense
虐待	to mistreat to maltreat to abuse mistreatment maltreatment
谋杀	to murder to assassinate intentional homicide
迫害	to persecute persecution
White Americans (Object)	
白人	white people
白人至上	white supremacy

Notes: The following terms were removed as they were missing in 10% or more subcorpora: 侨务, 侨民, 侨胞, 华埠, 非洲裔美国人, 受害, 处决, and 敌对.

Table A5: Dictionaries for Political Wedge Analysis

Term	Definition
Chaos (Attribute)	
衝突	conflict
纷争	to dispute
冲突	conflict to conflict clash of opposing forces collision (of interests) contention
动乱	turmoil upheaval unrest
流血冲突	bloody conflict
政治危机	political crisis
武装冲突	armed conflict
争执	to dispute to disagree to argue opinionatedly to wrangle
暴乱	riot rebellion revolt
危机	crisis
内战	civil war
紧张局势	tense situation
争端	dispute controversy conflict
战事	war hostilities fighting
动荡	unrest (social or political) turmoil upheaval commotion
骚乱	disturbance riot to create a disturbance
对立	to oppose to set sth against to be antagonistic to antithetical relative opposite opposing diametrical
暴动	insurrection rebellion
暴力事件	violent event

Term	Definition
争议	controversy dispute to dispute
摩擦	friction rubbing chafing fig. disharmony conflict also written 磨擦
对峙	to stand opposite to confront confrontation
动F	unstable
分歧	divergent difference (of opinion, position) disagreement bifurcation (math.)
争论	to argue to debate to contend argument contention controversy debate
战争	war conflict
矛盾	contradiction
战乱	chaos of war
纠纷	dispute
经济危机	economic crisis
风波	disturbance crisis disputes restlessness
僵局	impasse deadlock
歧见	disagreement differing interpretations
敌对	hostile enemy (factions) combative
紧张	nervous keyed up intense tense strained in short supply scarce
混乱	confusion chaos disorder
战火	conflagration the fire of war
不安	unpeaceful unstable uneasy disturbed restless worried
乱象	chaos madness
Corruption (Attribute)	

Table A5: Dictionaries for Political Wedge Analysis *(continued)*

Term	Definition
受贿	to accept a bribe
贪渎	(of an official) corrupt and negligent of his duty
行贿	to bribe to give bribes
贪污	to be corrupt corruption to embezzle
违法	illegal to break the law
贿赂	to bribe a bribe
不法	lawless illegal unlawful
挪用	to shift (funds) to (legitimately) take funds set aside for one purpose in order to use them for another to embezzle to misappropriate
收受	to receive to accept
图利	NA
公款	public money
涉案	(of a perpetrator, victim, weapon, sum of money etc) to be involved in the case
违纪	lack of discipline to break a rule to violate discipline to breach a principle
舞弊	to engage in fraud
失职	to lose one's job unemployment not to fulfill one's obligations to neglect one's job dereliction of duty
违法行为	illegal behavior
腐败	corruption to corrupt to rot rotten
涉嫌	to be a suspect (in a crime) to be suspected of
诈欺	fraud deception

Term	Definition
勾结	to collude with to collaborate with to gang up with
查办	to investigate and handle (a criminal case)
违规	to violate (rules) irregular illegal corrupt
弊案	scandal
侵占	to invade and occupy (territory)
贪腐	corruption
Country (Object)	
马来西亚	Malaysia
马耳他	Malta
乌兹别克斯坦	Uzbekistan
乌兹别克	Uzbekistan
克罗地亚	Croatia
克罗埃西亚	Croatia
波斯尼亚	Bosnia and Herzegovina
黑塞哥维那	Bosnia and Herzegovina
波兰	Poland
津巴布韦	Zimbabwe
安哥拉	Angola
玻利维亚	Bolivia
多米尼加	Dominican Republic
多明尼加	Dominican Republic
委内瑞拉	Venezuela

Term	Definition
冰岛	Iceland
新加坡	Singapore
法国	France
坦桑尼亚	Tanzania
东帝汶	East Timor
马提尼克	Martinique
巴哈马	Bahamas
尼加拉瓜	Nicaragua
刚果共和国	Republic of Congo
拉脱维亚	Latvia
斐济	Fiji
巴拿马	Panama
塞拉利昂	Sierra Leone
狮子山	Sierra Leone
阿富汗	Afghanistan
新西兰	New Zealand
紐西蘭	New Zealand
圣卢西亚	Saint Lucia
密克罗尼西亚	Micronesia
佛得角	Cape Verde
刚果民主共和国	Democratic Republic of Congo
基里巴斯	Kiribati

Term	Definition
伯利兹	Belize
贝里斯	Belize
乌克兰	Ukraine
安提瓜和巴布达	Antigua and Barbuda
史瓦济兰	Swaziland
科威特	Kuwait
马里	Mali
哥斯达黎加	Costa Rica
智利	Chile
黑山	Montenegro
蒙特内哥罗	Montenegro
帕劳	Palau
圣文森特和格林纳丁斯	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
格林纳丁斯	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
圣文森特	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
洪都拉斯	Honduras
布基纳法索	Burkina Faso
西班牙	Spain
利比亚	Libya
乌干达	Uganda
萨摩亚	Samoa
莫桑比克	Mozambique

Term	Definition
莫三比克	Mozambique
土库曼	Turkmenistan
土库曼斯坦	Turkmenistan
蒙古	Mongolia
纳米比亚	Namibia
冈比亚	Gambia
厄瓜多尔	Ecuador
萨尔瓦多	El Salvador
斯洛文尼亚	Slovenia
阿尔及利亚	Algeria
美国	United States
老挝	Laos
寮国	Laos
英国	United Kingdom
立陶宛	Lithuania
加拿大	Canada
突尼斯	Tunisia
苏里南	Suriname
卢旺达	Rwanda
巴西	Brazil
以色列	Israel
阿鲁巴	Aruba

Term	Definition
塞尔维亚	Serbia
韩国	South Korea
大韩民国	South Korea
南韩	South Korea
南朝鲜	South Korea
尼日利亚	Nigeria
奈及利亚	Nigeria
加纳	Ghana
巴布亚新几内亚	Papua New Guinea
格鲁吉亚	Georgia
乔治亚	Georgia
巴拉圭	Paraguay
台湾	Taiwan
中华民国	Taiwan
臺湾	Taiwan
列支敦士登	Liechtenstein
澳门	Macao
安道尔	Andorra
阿根廷	Argentina
瑞典	Sweden
孟加拉国	Bangladesh
孟加拉	Bangladesh

Term	Definition
阿拉伯联合酋长国	United Arab Emirates
阿联酋	United Arab Emirates
阿拉伯联合大公国	United Arab Emirates
多哥	Togo
法屬圭亞那	French Guiana
文莱达鲁萨兰国	Brunei Darussalam
文莱	Brunei Darussalam
汶莱	Brunei Darussalam
乌拉圭	Uruguay
加蓬	Gabon
日本	Japan
马尔代夫	Maldives
马尔地夫	Maldives
奥地利	Austria
缅甸	Myanmar
贝宁	Benin
爱尔兰	Ireland
阿曼	Oman
中国	China
塞浦路斯	Cyprus
尼泊尔	Nepal
赤道几内亚	Equatorial Guinea

Term	Definition
圭亚那	Guyana
塔吉克斯坦	Tajikistan
塔吉克	Tajikistan
塞内加尔	Senegal
土耳其	Turkey
罗马尼亚	Romania
希腊	Greece
伊朗	Iran
巴巴多斯	Barbados
利比里亚	Liberia
越南	Vietnam
海地	Haiti
吐瓦鲁	Tuvalu
图瓦卢	Tuvalu
肯尼亚	Kenya
肯亚	Kenya
荷兰	Netherlands
马达加斯加	Madagascar
瓦努阿图	Vanuatu
万那杜	Vanuatu
博茨瓦纳	Botswana
波札那	Botswana

Term	Definition
摩纳哥	Monaco
吉布提	Djibouti
梵帝冈	Holy See
哥伦比亚	Colombia
朝鲜	North Korea
北韩	North Korea
北朝鲜	North Korea
朝鲜民主主义人民共和国	North Korea
泰国	Thailand
柬埔寨	Cambodia
蒲隆地	Burundi
牙买加	Jamaica
马绍尔群岛	Marshall-Islands
特立尼达和多巴哥	Trinidad and Tobago
特立尼达	Trinidad and Tobago
多巴哥	Trinidad and Tobago
亚美尼亚	Armenia
秘鲁	Peru
法属波利尼西亚	French Polynesia
摩洛哥	Morocco
沙特阿拉伯	Saudi Arabia
沙特	Saudi Arabia

Table A5: Dictionaries for Political Wedge Analysis *(continued)*

Term	Definition
沙乌地阿拉伯	Saudi Arabia
爱沙尼亚	Estonia
丹麦	Denmark
瑞士	Switzerland
喀麦隆	Cameroon
塞舌尔	Seychelles
塞席尔	Seychelles
埃塞俄比亚	Ethiopia
衣索比亚	Ethiopia
俄罗斯	Russia
毛里求斯	Mauritius
模里西斯	Mauritius
伊拉克	Iraq
危地马拉	Guatemala
瓜地马拉	Guatemala
斯洛伐克	Slovakia
马拉维	Malawi
摩尔多瓦	Moldova
卡塔尔	Qatar
卡达	Qatar
多米尼克	Dominica
香港	Hong Kong

Term	Definition
叙利亚	Syria
赞比亚	Zambia
尚比亞	Zambia
白俄罗斯	Belarus
格陵兰	Greenland
科特迪瓦	Côte d'Ivoire
象牙海岸	Côte d'Ivoire
埃及	Egypt
印度尼西亚	Indonesia
印尼	Indonesia
墨西哥	Mexico
阿尔巴尼亚	Albania
巴基斯坦	Pakistan
百慕达群岛	Bermuda
几内亚	Guinea
古巴	Cuba
保加利亚	Bulgaria
印度	India
莱索托	Lesotho
南非	South Africa
黎巴嫩	Lebanon
卢森堡	Luxembourg

Term	Definition
匈牙利	Hungary
菲律宾	Philippines
巴林	Bahrain
捷克共和国	Czech Republic
葡萄牙	Portugal
新喀里多尼亚	New Caledonia
波多黎各	Puerto Rico
尼日尔	Niger
尼日	Niger
德国	Germany
苏丹	Sudan
索马里	Somalia
索马利亚	Somalia
约旦	Jordan
吉尔吉斯斯坦	Kyrgyzstan
吉尔吉斯	Kyrgyzstan
圣马力诺	San Marino
澳大利亚	Australia
澳洲	Australia
圣多美普林西比	São Tomé and Príncipe
也门	Yemen
叶门	Yemen

Table A5: Dictionaries for Political Wedge Analysis *(continued)*

Term	Definition
哈萨克斯坦	Kazakhstan
哈萨克	Kazakhstan
圣基茨和尼维斯	Saint Kitts and Nevis
圣基茨	Saint Kitts and Nevis
尼维斯	Saint Kitts and Nevis
阿塞拜疆	Azerbaijan
亚塞拜然	Azerbaijan
挪威	Norway
厄立特里亚	Eritrea
厄利垂亚	Eritrea
意大利	Italy
义大利	Italy
安圭拉	Anguilla
瑙鲁	Nauru
诺鲁	Nauru
不丹	Bhutan
比利时	Belgium
斯里兰卡	Sri Lanka
马其顿	Republic of Macedonia
巴勒斯坦	Palestinian National Authority
毛里塔尼亚	Mauritania
中非共和国	Central African Republic

(Continued on Next Page...)

Term	Definition
乍得	Chad
芬兰	Finland
Sports (Attribute)	
排球	volleyball
射箭	archery to shoot an arrow
篮球	basketball
跆拳道	taekwondo (Korean martial art)
体操	gymnastic gymnastics
羽毛球	shuttlecock badminton
手球	team handball
曲棍球	field hockey
桌球	table tennis table tennis ball (Tw) billiards pool snooker (HK, Singapore, Malaysia)
垒球	softball
棒球	baseball
乒乓球	table tennis ping-pong table tennis ball
举重	to lift weights weight-lifting (sports)
击剑	fencing (sport)
足球	soccer ball a football
羽球	badminton
柔道	judo
保龄球	ten-pin bowling (loanword) bowling ball

Table A5: Dictionaries for Political Wedge Analysis *(continued)*

Term	Definition
选手	athlete contestant
田径	track and field (athletics)
拳击	boxing
橄榄球	football played with oval-shaped ball (rugby, American football, Australian rules etc)
竞技	competition of skill (e.g. sports) athletics tournament
网球	tennis tennis ball
撞球	billiards billiards ball pool (game)
赛艇	boat race racing ship or boat rowing (sport)
国手	(sports) member of the national team national representative (medicine, chess etc) one of the most highly skilled practitioners in one's country
女足	women' s soccer
中华队	Chinese team
比赛	competition (sports etc) match
中国队	China' s team
运动员	athlete
女队	women' s team
男队	men' s team
女排	women's volleyball abbr. for 女子排球
国家队	the national team
球队	sports team (basketball, soccer, football etc)
游泳	swimming to swim

(Continued on Next Page...)

Table A5: Dictionaries for Political Wedge Analysis *(continued)*

Term	Definition
冰球	ice hockey puck
体育	sports physical education
教练	instructor sports coach trainer
代表队	delegation
体育运动	sports physical culture
女篮	women＇s basketball
摔跤	to trip and fall to wrestle wrestling (sports)
女选手	female player
赛事	competition (e.g. sporting)
皮划艇	canoe kayak
桥牌	contract bridge (card game)
球员	sports club member footballer, golfer etc
围棋	the game of Go
国际象棋	chess
男篮	men's basketball men's basketball team
参赛	to compete to take part in a competition
武术	military skill or technique (in former times) all kinds of martial art sports (some claiming spiritual development) self-defense tradition of choreographed fights from opera and film (recent usage) also called kungfu 功夫
团体赛	team competition
参赛选手	contestant

Term	Definition
象棋	Chinese chess
体坛	sporting circles the world of sport
跳水	to dive (into water) (sports) diving to commit suicide by jumping into water (fig.) (of stock prices etc) to fall dramatically
花样滑冰	figure skating
足球运动	soccer
速滑	speed skating

Notes: The following terms were removed as they were missing in 10% or more subcorpora: 侨务, 侨民, 侨胞, 华埠, 非洲裔美国人, 受害, 处决, and 敌对.

Figures

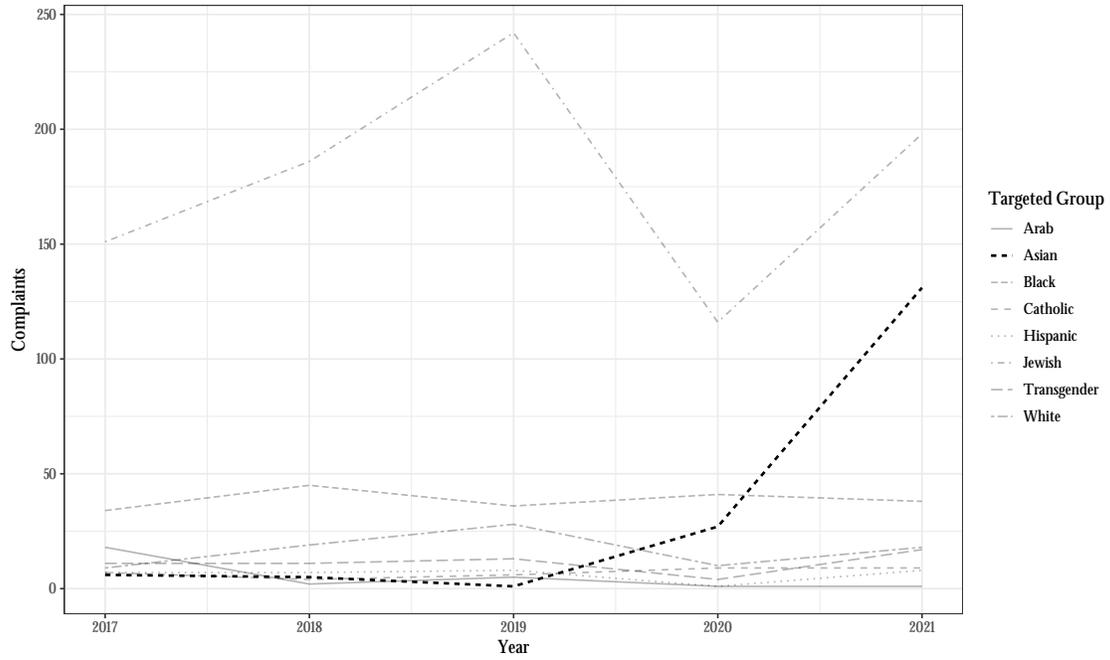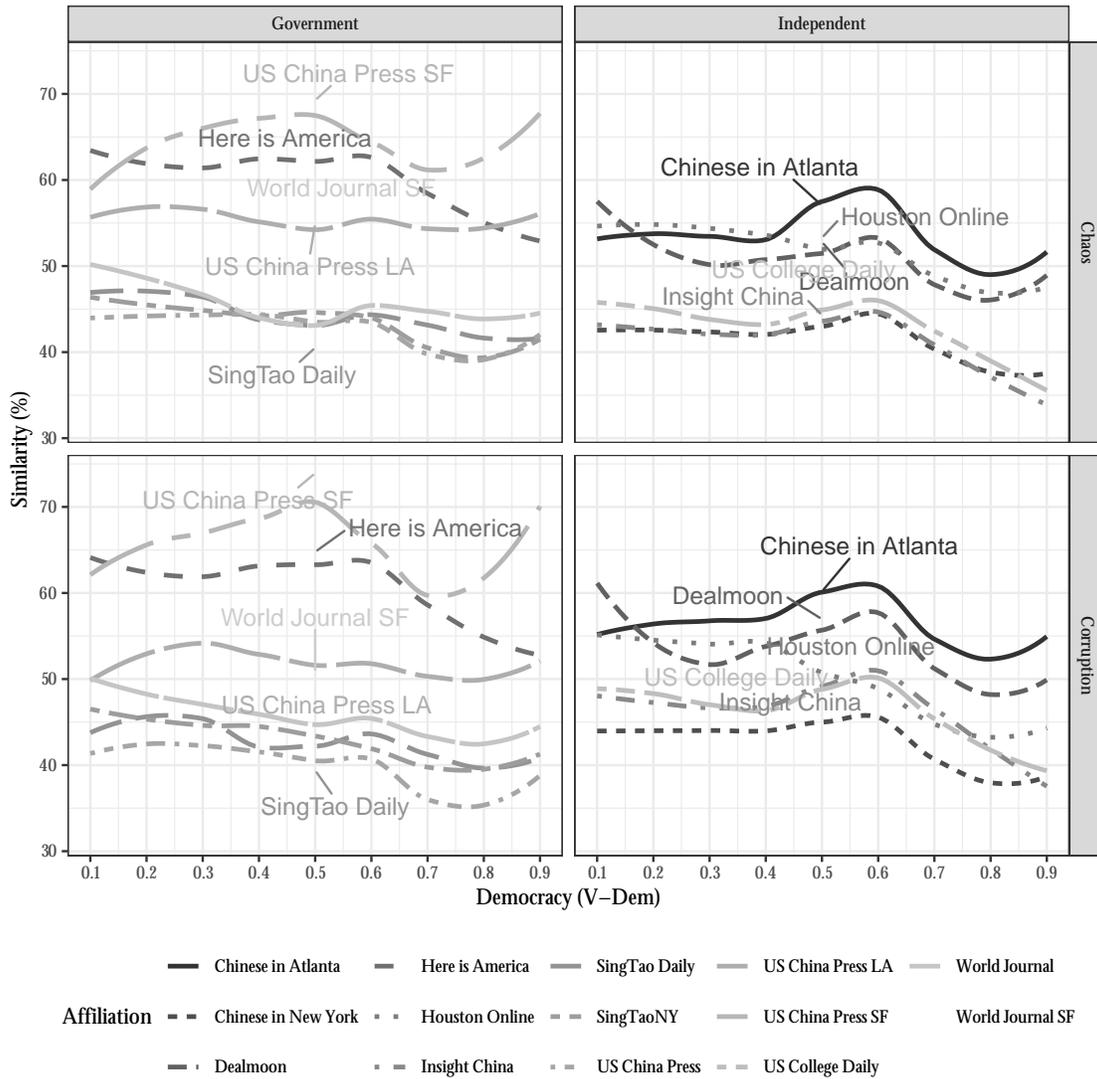**Figure A5:** Complaints about Hate Crimes in New York City by Year and Targeted Group

Figure A6: Trend in Country Framing over Regime Type by Subscription Account

Tables

Table A6: Effect of Government Affiliation on Racism and Violence Framing

	Racism (1)	Racism (2)	Racism (3)	Racism (4)	Violence (5)	Violence (6)	Violence (7)	Violence (8)
	Similarity with Diaspora Dictionary (%)							
Government	6.28***	5.48***	6.29***	3.64***	5.11***	3.20***	4.98***	1.83**
	(1.00)	(1.05)	(1.02)	(0.87)	(0.66)	(0.69)	(0.66)	(0.77)
ln Frequency 1		-0.66		-2.82***		-1.08***		-3.29***
		(0.84)		(0.41)		(0.28)		(0.24)
ln Frequency 2		-0.53*		-1.18***		-2.15***		-1.96***
		(0.32)		(0.25)		(0.24)		(0.37)
Statistics								
Observations	489	489	489	489	963	963	963	963
Fixed effects								
Dictionary FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 White robust standard-errors are clustered on the attribute dictionary. Dependent variable is cosine similarity between respective object and attribute dictionaries. Controls for dictionary frequency are shown. Unit of analysis is the object-attribute word pair, which varies according to the object and attribute dictionary size.

Table A7: Government Framing of Diaspora with Racism and Violence by Standard Error Type

| | *Similarity with Diaspora Dictionary (%)* | | | | | | | | | |
| | Racism | | | | | Violence | | | | |
	Hetero. (1)	Cluster (Obj) (2)	Boot (Obj) (3)	Cluster (Attr) (4)	Boot (Attr) (5)	Hetero. (6)	Cluster (Obj) (7)	Boot (Obj) (8)	Cluster (Attr) (9)	Boot (Attr) (10)
Government	3.64***	3.64**	3.64***	3.64***	3.64***	1.83***	1.83***	1.83***	1.83**	1.83**
	(0.91)	(1.43)	(1.23)	(0.87)	(0.76)	(0.45)	(0.56)	(0.48)	(0.77)	(0.73)
ln Frequency 1	-2.82***	-2.82***	-2.82***	-2.82***	-2.82***	-3.29***	-3.29***	-3.29***	-3.29***	-3.29***
	(0.45)	(1.08)	(0.92)	(0.41)	(0.39)	(0.25)	(0.47)	(0.42)	(0.24)	(0.23)
ln Frequency 2	-1.18***	-1.18	-1.18	-1.18***	-1.18***	-1.96***	-1.96***	-1.96***	-1.96***	-1.96***
	(0.43)	(0.88)	(0.78)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.36)	(0.32)	(0.37)	(0.35)
Statistics										
Observations	489	489	489	489	489	963	963	963	963	963
Fixed effects										
Dictionary FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 Regressions labeled with "Boot" use Wild Bootstrapping to compute standard errors. Dependent variable is cosine similarity between respective object and attribute dictionaries. Controls for dictionary frequency are shown. Unit of analysis is the object-attribute word pair, which varies according to the object and attribute dictionary size.

Table A8: Government Framing of Countries Conditioning on Regime by Standard Error Type

	Similarity with Country Dictionary (%)									
	Chaos					Corruption				
	Hetero. (1)	Cluster (Obj) (2)	Boot (Obj) (3)	Cluster (Attr) (4)	Boot (Attr) (5)	Hetero. (6)	Cluster (Obj) (7)	Boot (Obj) (8)	Cluster (Attr) (9)	Boot (Attr) (10)
Government Accounts	-0.11	-0.11	-0.11	-0.11	-0.11	-7.18***	-7.18***	-7.18***	-7.18***	-7.18***
	(0.29)	(1.05)	(1.03)	(1.15)	(1.14)	(0.40)	(0.98)	(0.93)	(1.59)	(1.58)
Democracy (vdem)	-0.42	-0.42	-0.42	-0.42	-0.42	1.40	1.40	1.40	1.40	1.40
	(1.73)	(7.71)	(7.39)	(1.00)	(1.03)	(2.41)	(8.70)	(8.57)	(1.70)	(1.63)
Govt. Acct. x Democracy	2.79***	2.79***	2.79***	2.79***	2.79***	3.86***	3.86***	3.86***	3.86***	3.86***
	(0.26)	(0.96)	(0.98)	(0.34)	(0.33)	(0.37)	(1.02)	(1.01)	(0.38)	(0.38)
ln Frequency 1	-1.58***	-1.58***	-1.58***	-1.58***	-1.58***	-1.96***	-1.96***	-1.96***	-1.96***	-1.96***
	(0.03)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.11)	(0.11)
ln Frequency 2	-3.57***	-3.57***	-3.57***	-3.57***	-3.57***	-2.31***	-2.31***	-2.31***	-2.31***	-2.31***
	(0.04)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.37)	(0.36)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.44)	(0.43)
Statistics										
Observations	93453	93453	93453	93453	93453	48636	48636	48636	48636	48636
Fixed effects										
Subscription Account	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dictionary FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 Regressions labeled with "Boot" use Wild Bootstrapping to compute standard errors. Dependent variable is cosine similarity between country and respective attribute dictionaries. Controls for dictionary term frequency are shown. Unit of analysis is the object-attribute word pair, which varies according to the object and attribute dictionary size.

Table A9: Effect of Regime Type (Polyarchy) on Framing by Attribute

	Similarity with Country Dictionary (%)		
	Chaos (1)	Corruption (2)	Sports (3)
Government Accounts	-0.06	-7.31***	-3.26***
	(1.09)	(1.03)	(0.79)
Democracy (Polyarchy)	1.75	5.27	8.69*
	(6.65)	(7.09)	(4.46)
Govt. Acct. x Democracy	2.23**	3.42***	0.27
	(1.01)	(1.05)	(0.84)
ln Frequency 1	-1.58***	-1.96***	-2.28***
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
ln Frequency 2	-3.57***	-2.31***	-1.71***
	(0.09)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Statistics			
Observations	93453	48636	97180
Fixed effects			
Subscription Account	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dictionary	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 White robust standard-errors clustered on country in parentheses. Dependent variable is cosine similarity between country and respective attribute dictionaries. Controls for dictionary term frequency are shown. Unit of analysis is the object-attribute word pair, which varies according to the object and attribute dictionary size.

Table A10: Effect of Regime Type (Deliberative Democracy) on Framing by Attribute

	Similarity with Country Dictionary (%)		
	Chaos (1)	Corruption (2)	Sports (3)
Government Accounts	-0.20	-7.39***	-3.45***
	(1.06)	(1.00)	(0.75)
Democracy (Deliberative)	2.35	3.06	2.35
	(6.59)	(7.65)	(5.66)
Govt. Acct. x Democracy	3.04***	4.36***	0.69
	(1.01)	(1.06)	(0.83)
ln Frequency 1	-1.58***	-1.96***	-2.29***
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
ln Frequency 2	-3.57***	-2.31***	-1.71***
	(0.09)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Statistics			
Observations	93453	48636	97180
Fixed effects			
Subscription Account	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dictionary	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 White robust standard-errors clustered on country in parentheses. Dependent variable is cosine similarity between country and respective attribute dictionaries. Controls for dictionary term frequency are shown. Unit of analysis is the object-attribute word pair, which varies according to the object and attribute dictionary size.