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Research

Digital Influence Vectors in Malaysia

Foreign Information Manipulation and Intervention,
Cognitive Threats, and Influence Defense Strategies

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Introduction

This report presents an assessment of digital influence vectors, foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) activities, and cognitive threat dynamics active in Malaysia's information environment. It integrates techno-social threat intelligence with findings from two recent independent, nationally representative surveys: the first, commissioned by the Cyfluence Research Center, was conducted online and concluded in August 2025; the second, commissioned by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) and conducted by Merdeka Center for Opinion Research was concluded in late December 2025.

While both surveys employ quantitative methodologies, this report undertakes a structured cross-survey comparison to identify convergences, divergences, and emerging patterns across subjects of concern, such as cognitive resilience, media trust, democratic sentiment, and geopolitical orientation. This approach prioritizes analytical validity by correlating findings across independent datasets.

This report aims to drive actionable insights and conclusions regarding Malaysia's information environment, malign narrative penetration, the evolving cognitive threat landscape, and appropriate influence defence strategies.

This threat assessment argues that while Malaysia is not experiencing evident authoritarian conversion, **it is under sustained, structurally-embedded exposure to anti-Western narratives**. Crucially, the growing body of knowledge, consisting of threat intelligence, expert analyses and correlated survey results, should inform internal and external Influence Defense stakeholders and practitioners alike in identifying key attack surfaces, devising appropriate mitigation strategies and establishing cognitive resilience capacity to counter narrative attacks and associated risks.

Key analytical observations and operational insights are summarized below.

Strategic and Geopolitical Setting

Malaysia occupies a strategically significant position at the intersection of great-power competition between China and the United States. Its high social media penetration, multiethnic demographic composition, non-aligned foreign policy tradition, and growing digital economy render it both an attractive target and a potentially permeable environment for foreign influence efforts.

Malaysia is situated at the intersection of intensifying geopolitical competition and complex domestic dynamics. As a key player in Southeast Asia, it continuously calibrates its external relations among major actors while simultaneously managing a highly diverse internal landscape defined by ethnic, linguistic, and religious heterogeneity. This strategic positioning is further complicated by a rapidly evolving information environment in which traditional media, digital platforms, and transnational information flows affect public discourse.

Within this context, narratives originating from authoritarian states, chiefly the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, have achieved growing visibility in Malaysia's media and online ecosystems.

Influence Vectors in Malaysia's Information Environment

Chinese and Russian narratives are disseminated via a network of media channels, news aggregators and amplifiers. These include PRC government agencies, diplomatic missions, state-linked media outlets, aligned local intermediaries, social media amplification networks, and individual influencers.

In some cases, the propagation of autocratic narratives displays characteristics consistent with identified information operations and tools, techniques and procedures (TTPs) attributed to the PRC: selective framing of global events, glorification of authoritarian figureheads and governance models, delegitimization of Western institutions or policies, and the promotion of multipolarity as an alternative normative global order.

In particular, China's information influence strategy relies on tightly integrated propaganda, disinformation, media acquisition and diplomatic engagement. This complex apparatus is aimed at gaining narrative superiority, with a core emphasis on shaping perceptions and policy in favor of Beijing's strategic interests.

To that extent, CCP agencies, including the Central Propaganda Department, People's Liberation Army, Public Security Bureaus, and state-owned media work in conjunction to orchestrate hostile influence campaigns (HICs). These activities combine public messaging with covert tactics and target political, media, and academic bodies.

Common covert tactics used by China including hijacking dormant/inactive social media profiles (i.e. account takeover) and repurposing them to spread pro-China messaging, coordinated sharing of Synthetic Propaganda and other types of content designed to discredit critics, and leveraging international and domestic platforms for public opinion manipulation.¹

In terms of impact, the accrued efficacy of official Chinese narratives – and to a much lesser extent that of Russian narratives – largely stems from information flows configuration.

Within the Malaysian media landscape, China holds a pervasive and dominant presence in economic and geopolitical matters. This reality serves as an enabling element, as backed by survey results. It also underscores the relatively high exposure to Chinese-determined narratives and PRC state-sanctioned information sources.

As such, Chinese messaging can be overtly transmitted to extensive portions of the Malaysian population, without having to invest in, or rely on, covert means for influencing public perception.



Figure 1 – Key social media platforms and PRC-aligned news outlets affecting Malaysia’s information environment (CRC research; 2025).

Due to its disposition, Malaysia’s information environment provides inherent entry vectors and exposure surfaces for Chinese narratives. Whether they originate from foreign or domestic sources, these narratives are rapidly introduced into daily news cycles and online discourse and circulated among Malaysian audiences. These existing influence vectors are consistently leveraged by China and are seen as preferred vehicles of strategic communications and narrative proliferation.

China’s Three-Tier Influence Architecture

A network analysis conducted by CRC analysts in February 2026 mapped a three-tier Chinese digital influence architecture affecting Malaysia’s information environment.

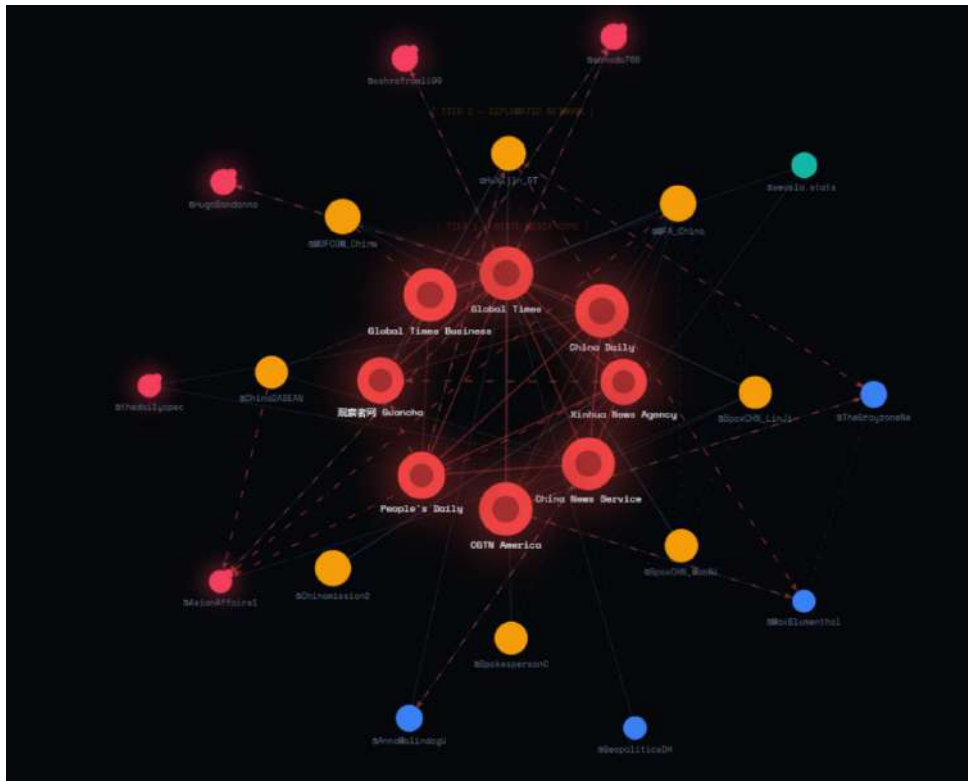


Figure 2 – CRC three-tier architecture analysis of a digital Chinese influence network (Malaysia and SEA context; SM platforms: X/Twitter, Instagram; August 2025 – February 2026)

At the core, a cluster of eight interconnected state media outlets – including Xinhua, China Daily, and Global Times – reach a combined 79 million followers on X (formerly Twitter) and Meta’s Instagram, disseminating coordinated narratives framing China as Malaysia’s indispensable partner in trade, security and cultural exchange.

The second tier comprises serving MFA spokespeople, official embassy accounts, and MOFCOM, which generate authoritative messaging amplified downstream. This layer introduces coercive signaling, exemplified by the recent Chinese Ministry of Commerce’s (MOFCOM) warning that Malaysia must not pursue trade arrangements that “harm China’s interests.”²

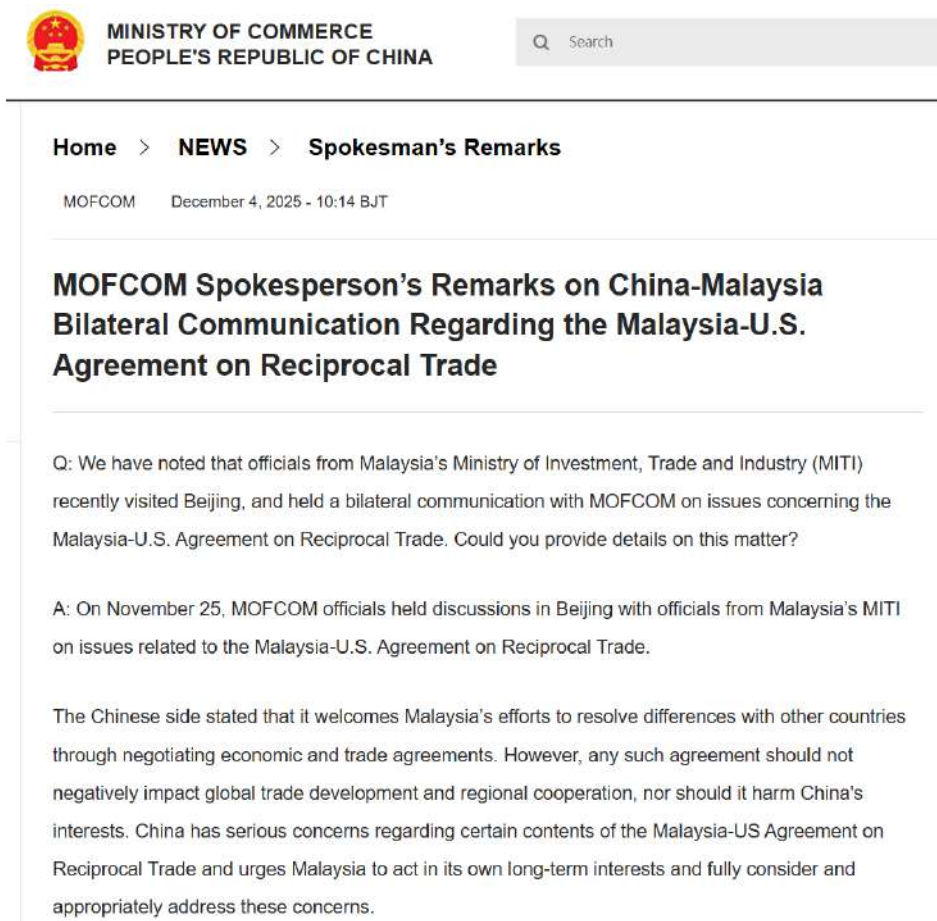


Figure 3 - Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) spokesperson’s remarks warning that Malaysia’s trade arrangements should not “harm China’s interests,” illustrating coercive economic signalling in bilateral messaging.

The outer tier blends hyper-active inauthentic accounts simulating organic local endorsement with Western-facing proxies such as *The Grayzone* (@TheGrayzoneNews), which repackage PRC-positive narratives as independent analysis.



Figure 4 - Post by X account The Grayzone criticising reporting on the alleged Uyghur genocide, reflecting narrative alignment with PRC positions on Xinjiang.³

This structure reflects a top-down system: state media establish narrative baselines, state officials and diplomats expand reach to external audiences, inauthentic networks amplify messaging, and intellectual proxies (e.g. commentators and influencers) confer “independent” legitimacy. The result is a layered, deniable apparatus with varied penetration avenues into Malaysia’s information space.

Chinese Narratives Targeting Malaysia

Chinese influence efforts target Malaysian audiences with a standard mix of positive promotion of China and its governance model alongside traditional Chinese counter-narratives to criticism. Chinese officials often emphasize what they refer to as continued “friendship” and close ties between Malaysia and China and stress that initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative benefit both countries.

The topic of the South China Sea is repeatedly used by Chinese officials and media outlets, stressing China’s efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region, while depicting rivals as either seeking control in the region or unfairly portraying China as an aggressor.⁴

However, findings from both the CRC survey and the Merdeka Center survey converge in showing that a majority of Malaysians identify China as the primary actor responsible for tensions in the South China Sea.

The 2025 CRC survey indicated that a majority of Malaysian respondents (56.6%) attribute tensions in the South China Sea primarily to China, with the United States emerging as the second most frequently cited actor. However, perceptions vary significantly across ethnic groups, revealing meaningful attitudinal divergence. Indian Malaysians are the most likely to single out China as responsible (74.0%), followed by Bumiputera respondents (57.4%). In contrast, Chinese Malaysian respondents are comparatively less inclined to assign primary responsibility to China (47.0%) and are more likely than other groups to attribute tensions to the United States (30.4%). These results are broadly mirrored in the Merdeka Center survey, where 55% of respondents identify China as the key perpetrator of South China Sea tensions, again with the United States ranking second (21%).

This consistency strengthens confidence in the validity of this perception across the Malaysian public, while intra-ethnic variation highlights geopolitical attribution within Malaysian society.

Chinese Influence Strategies in Malaysia: Fragmentation and Narrative Consolidation

China’s influence posture in Malaysia is best understood as a hybrid strategy, combining two, mutually-reinforcing, objectives:

- I. **Inducing Social Fragmentation** – A subtle attempt at undermining social cohesion within Malaysia’s diverse society, particularly by leveraging identity rifts and diaspora connections.
- II. **Reinforcing Narrative Alignment** – An ongoing effort to normalise and entrench Beijing’s foreign policy narratives within Malaysian public discourse, thereby aligning segments of elite and mass opinion with Chinese strategic preferences.

Together, these strategies serve Beijing’s long-term objective of securing Malaysia within a politically neutral or China-leaning strategic orbit while limiting resistance to Chinese economic, political, and geopolitical dominance.

Concretely, Chinese-language media in Malaysia was observed highlighting pro-China views and discouraging support of Beijing’s opponents. Simultaneously, ‘Soft Power’ initiatives, including China-sponsored training programs for Malaysian journalists, are supported by ‘Sharp Power’ campaigns to

secure political influence. Sharp power campaigns, which use covert influence tactics, such as information manipulation, censorship, and artificial promotion of pro-China content, are often targeted at Malaysia's Chinese diaspora.

In recent years, China has consistently relied on its official government channels to spread its narratives, including disinformation. For example, in June 2019, the official Facebook page of the Chinese embassy in Malaysia shared a video that included popular conspiracies claiming that the Hong Kong protests were funded by the West



Figure 5 – A post published by the Chinese Embassy in Malaysia's official Facebook account linking to a conspiratorial YouTube video discrediting the Hong Kong protests as funded by the West (June 2019).

China's Influence in Sabah

China's influence operations in Sabah exemplify an ongoing subtle attempt to exploit existing rifts and grievances within Malaysian society. These efforts are characterized by a strategy that prioritizes the cultivation of ties with local ethnic Chinese elites using an array of business, political, and academic networks.⁵ By doing so, Beijing has gained access to state institutions, media platforms, and policymakers, allowing it to indirectly shape internal discourse – on both a local and national level – regarding strategic issues.

Localized influence is therefore leveraged to influence perceptions on topics such as resource allocation (mainly petroleum revenue), infrastructure development (e.g. Belt and Road projects), and South China Sea interests.

This approach intersects with Malaysia's complex socio-political reality, where ethnic and religious identities play a central role in governance and socio-political mobility. In that context, China specifically targets local Malaysian-Chinese elites in order to affect domestic politics while reinforcing perceptions of segregated alignment along ethnic lines.

According to a recent report by Sinopsis, Chinese influence activities in Sabah are mostly conducted through various Chinese Communist Party (CCP) bodies assigned to the United Front Work Department (UFWD) and foreign affairs system. Influence efforts attributed to other agencies appear to be present albeit less prevalent.

In the long term, these sustained efforts can pose a strategic threat to Malaysia's societal cohesion. **By deepening societal rifts, they create strategic opportunities for China, including potential territorial ambitions** based on a shared ethno-linguistic identity, cultural-religious affinity and historic ties. This model is not new, it has been previously employed by states – most notably China and Russia – with large extraterritorial diasporas situated within their perceived “immediate sphere of influence.”

Chinese Narrative Mirroring by Media Outlets

A more recent case study exemplifies the spread of information disorder using Chinese media outlets, showing how Chinese-language media channels focus on pro-Beijing narratives, which are reinforced by direct and indirect influence tactics. Partnerships, journalist exchanges, and coordinated messaging are all used to spread Beijing-aligned narratives and endorse positive perceptions among Malaysia's Chinese diaspora.

In April 2025, Sin Chew Daily's front page focused on the news of President Xi's visit to Malaysia and the strategic partnership between China and Malaysia. The death of former Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, on the same day, featured only briefly on the cover.

Interestingly, the cover also included a Malaysian flag without its crescent moon, a key symbol of Malaysia's Islamic faith. This was met with significant public outcry and criticism that its omission was a form of deliberate anti-national sentiment. The apparent backlash highlights the occasional friction caused by Chinese triggering of Malaysian sensitivities, including national and religious sentiment.

Diplomatic Missions as Narrative Vectors

Chinese influence efforts in Malaysia are clearly reflected in the digital outreach architecture of the Chinese Embassy, which maintains three separate official Facebook pages in Chinese, English, and Bahasa⁶ These parallel, language-specific channels demonstrate a deliberate strategy of direct, audience-segmented communication with the Malaysian public rather than an exclusive reliance on third-party media intermediaries.

Audience metrics illustrate the differentiated reach of these efforts: the Chinese-language page commands the largest following (approx. 149,000 followers), followed by the English-language page (around 94,000), while the Bahasa Malaysia page trails significantly (approx).⁷

This distribution indicates both the centrality of the Chinese-language information ecosystem and the embassy's prioritisation of diaspora and Mandarin-speaking audiences, while still maintaining outreach to broader national audiences.



中国驻马来西亚大使馆 ✓

149K followers • 11 following
地址: 229, JALAN AMPANG, 50450 KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
电话: 00603-21811752(办公室)
■ Government organization \$\$\$

China Embassy in Malaysia ✓

94K followers • 15 following
Address: 229, JALAN AMPANG, 50450 KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
Tel: 00603-21811752(Administration)
00603-21760888(Visa Application Service Center)
00603-21416093(Culture and Education)
00603-42513555(Economy and Business)
■ Government organization

Kedutaan China di Malaysia ✓

13K followers • 12 following
Alamat: 229, JALAN AMPANG, 50450 KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
Tel: 00603-21811752(Pentadbiran)
00603-21760888(Pusat Perkhidmatan Permohonan Visa)
00603-21416093(Urusan Budaya dan Pendidikan)
00603-42513555(Urusan Ekonomi dan Perniagaan)
■ Government organization

Figure 7 - Official Facebook pages of the Embassy of the Republic of China in Malaysia, illustrating segmented digital outreach and direct Strategic Communications asset deployment.

Content across these platforms predominantly consists of official government statements, curated narratives on bilateral cooperation, economic partnership, infrastructure collaboration, and frequent promotion of Chinese innovation, technological advancement, and development achievements. The cumulative effect is the ongoing cultivation of a positive, modern, and partnership-oriented image of China, embedded directly within Malaysia’s social media landscape and tailored to distinct linguistic communities.

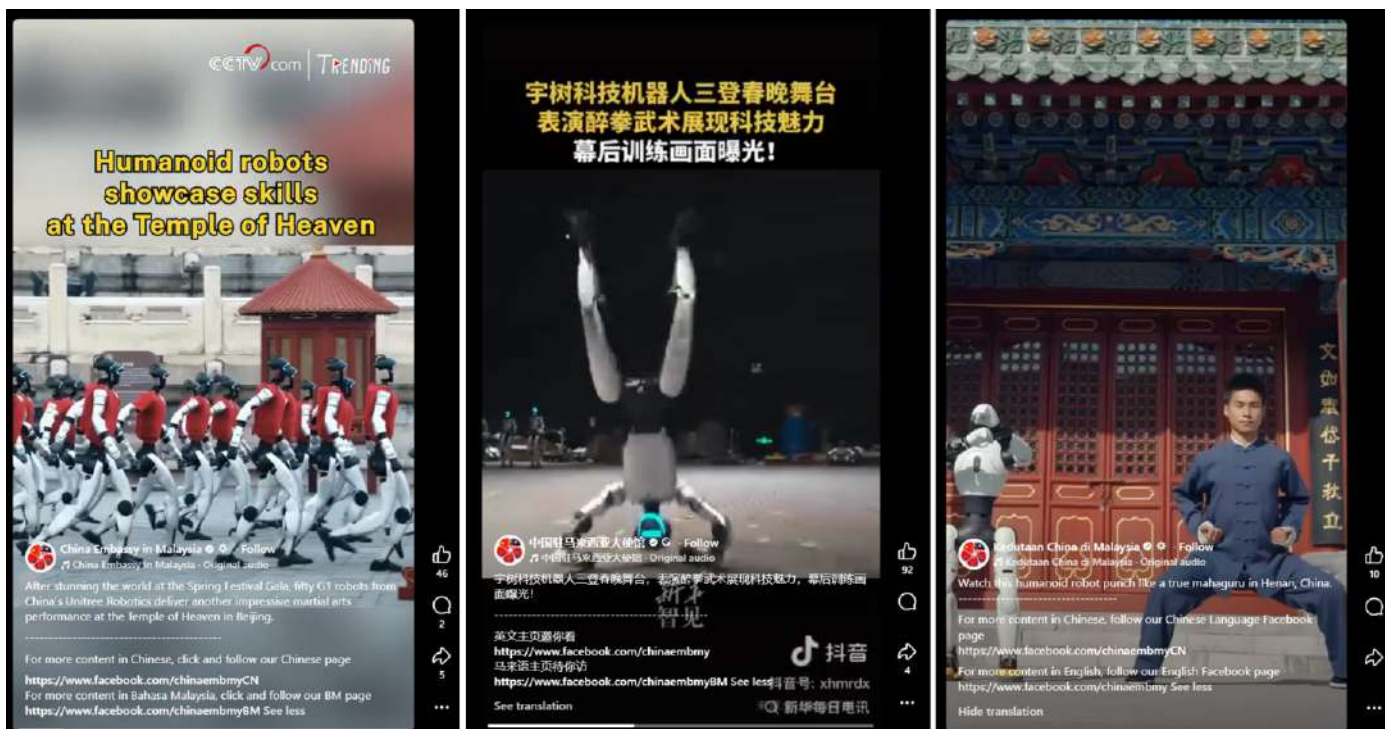


Figure 8 - Sample posts from the Chinese Embassy in Malaysia’s official Facebook accounts showcasing narratives on China’s technological advancement, with an emphasis on artificial intelligence and robotics innovation (February 2026). Footage is usually sourced from Chinese state-affiliated media outlets or repurposed from TikTok content.

Collectively, these channels function as examples of strategic communications (StratCom) asset deployment, whereby diplomatic digital infrastructure is leveraged as an integrated influence component to shape perception, reinforce state messaging, and maintain narrative dominance across target audiences.

Russian Narratives Targeting Malaysia

A CRC analysis has found that Russian narratives directed at Malaysian audiences primarily emphasise perceived ideological alignment between Kuala Lumpur and Moscow and are disseminated largely via social media channels.

At the same time, the downing of MH17 remains a central focus of sustained narrative reframing efforts concerning Russian responsibility. The Russian Embassy in Malaysia consistently rejects allegations of involvement and maintains a dedicated webpage outlining its official position.⁹ Notably, it refers to the incident as the “Malaysian Boeing catastrophe,” a framing that subtly shifts away attention from attribution of blame.

Malaysian outlets with partnerships involving Russian news agencies, including Bernama, have at times employed softer formulations that create discursive distance between Russia and the crash. For example, a Bernama Radio post omits reference to the international investigative consensus that MH17 was shot down by Russian-backed separatist forces, stating only that the aircraft “was shot down in Ukraine in 2014.”

The post reads: “#ICYMI Malaysia remains steadfast in its position to seek solutions and uphold justice, particularly for the families and victims of the Malaysia Airlines MH17 incident, which was shot down in Ukraine in 2014.”



Figure 9 - X/Twitter post by Bernama Radio referencing the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 while omitting attribution, reflecting narrative framing that avoids explicit linkage to Russia.⁹

This pattern reflects narrative minimisation and selective omission rather than direct denial, thereby reducing explicit linkage between Russia and the incident while avoiding overt denial of established findings.

Russia as a Key Strategic Partner

Russian soft power content consistently frames Moscow as a pivotal partner in Malaysia's national development, a narrative which is amplified across media platforms.

Institutional media partnerships boost this positioning. Malaysia's national news agency, Bernama, holds formal cooperation agreements with Russian state outlets including Sputnik, TV BRICS, and Rossiya Segodnya, facilitating content exchange and media training in Russia.¹⁰ These arrangements create indirect channels through which Russian perspectives enter Malaysia's information ecosystem.



KUALA LUMPUR, March 20 (Bernama) -- Russian Ambassador to Malaysia Naiyl Latypov and Malaysian National News Agency (Bernama) chairman Datuk Seri Wong Chun Wai discussed opportunities to further strengthen media cooperation between the two countries.

Figure 10 - Bernama news article reporting on Malaysia–Russia discussions regarding media cooperation in 2025.¹¹

In parallel, high-visibility platforms publish ostensibly independent commentary by thought leaders advocating closer alignment with Moscow. In February 2025, Eugene Arokiasamy.¹²



Eugene Arokiasamy's Blog

Facilitating Cooperation with Russia for Inclusive Nationhood Development in Malaysia: Countering Hegemonic Development Influence

February 25, 2025

As a prelude to my new series of interviews with decision-makers (both in Government and members of opposition parties in Malaysia), personalities of influence and action, I write this article on how I believe Russia-Malaysia cooperation may be facilitated Malaysian inclusive nationhood development. In previous articles I have shared my thoughts, ideas and suggestions for cooperation since 2014.

Figure 11 – Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) article by Eugene Arokiasamy arguing that close alignment with Russia is vital for Malaysia (25 February 2025).

Together, these institutional and discursive vectors attempt to reinforce the portrayal of Russia as a legitimate and strategically necessary partner for Malaysia.

Official Social Media Assets

Russia maintains a digital presence across major social media platforms through an array of official accounts. However, its aggregate reach in Malaysia remains modest relative to other global and regional actors.

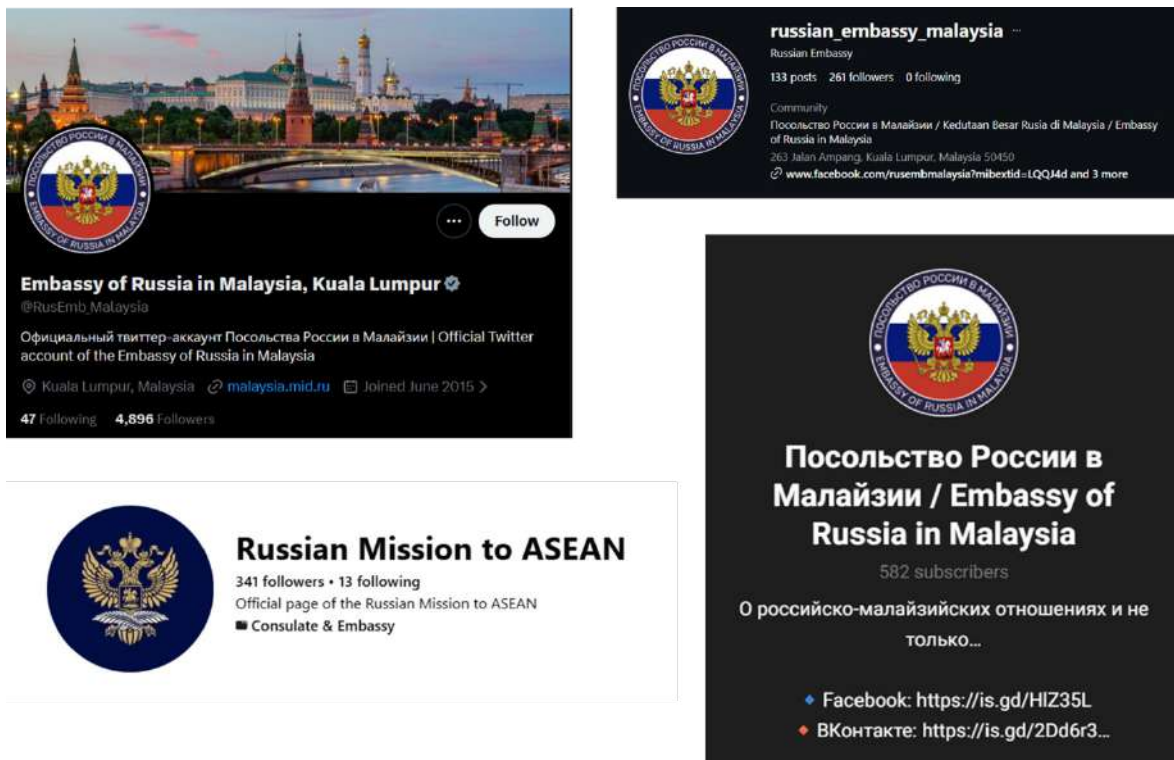


Figure 12 – Key official Russian social media accounts leveraged to disseminate and amplify narratives targeting Malaysian audiences (source: X/Twitter, Instagram, Telegram; February 2026).

Several factors likely account for this limited traction. First, survey data from both the Merdeka Center and the CRC indicate comparatively low Malaysian awareness and salience of Russia, especially when measured against countries perceived as geographically, economically, or culturally closer, such as China, Indonesia, or Japan.

Second, content output and localisation are uneven. In certain cases – notably on Telegram and VKontakte – official embassy channels publish predominantly or exclusively in Russian, limiting accessibility and engagement among Malaysian audiences. These platforms therefore function primarily as consular or expatriate-facing communication channels rather than FIMI instruments.

Third, activity levels across some diplomatic accounts are inconsistent. The Russian Embassy in Malaysia’s X/Twitter account, for example, has seen prolonged periods of stagnation, with only sporadic reposting of official statements or external media coverage.

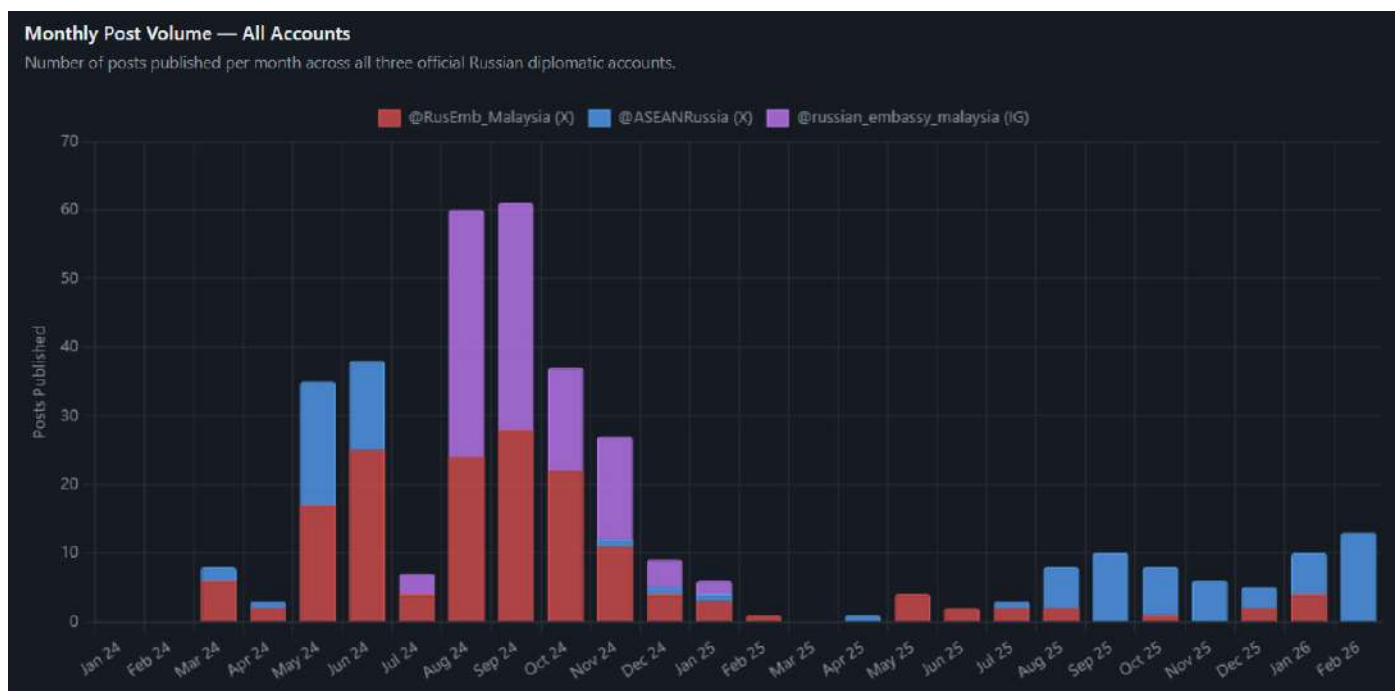


Figure 13 - Monthly post count of main official diplomatic Russian social media accounts, showing inactivity intervals (based on X/Twitter and Instagram telemetry).

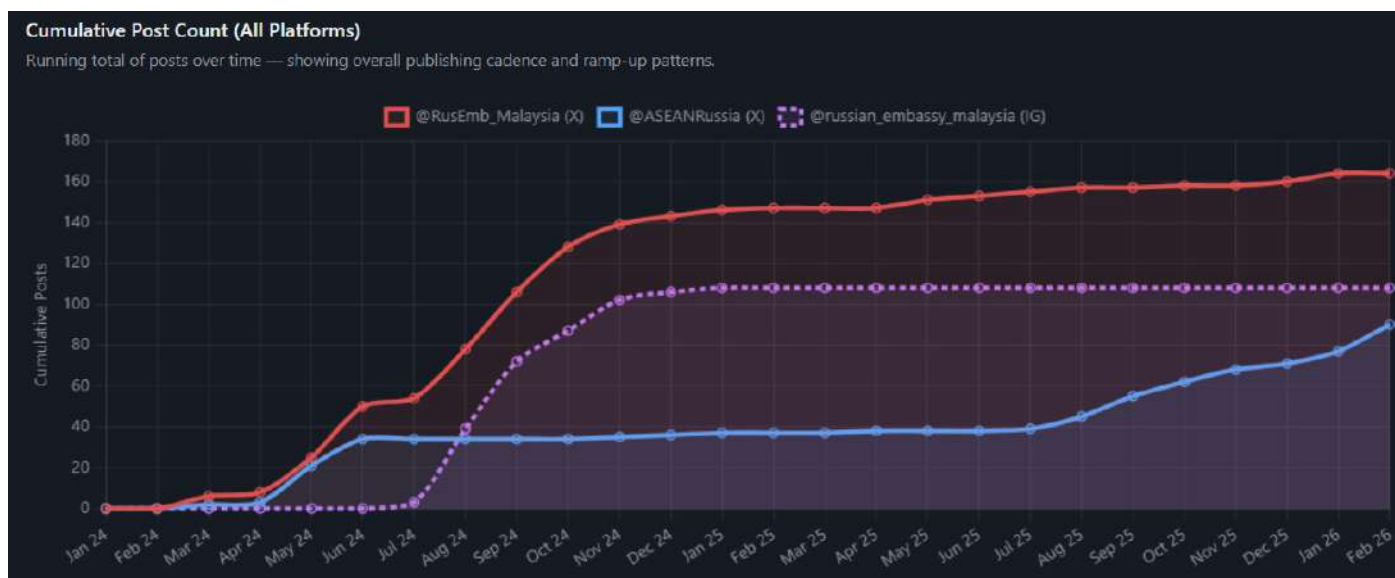


Figure 14 - Cumulative post count and activity patterns across official diplomatic Russian social media accounts (based on X/Twitter and Instagram telemetry).

This trend suggests structural or monetary difficulties in sustaining public, social media-based influence, or a lack of sufficient resource allocation and prioritization by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Cultural Institutions and Influencers

Although considerable, Russia’s official outreach deficiency is mitigated by a network of local Malaysian and Russian influencers (mostly active on visuals-based platforms such as Instagram and TikTok), as well as cultural institutions. These serve as influence assets, projecting soft power and proliferating narratives focused on civil and economic cooperation, while amplifying official channels or fostering positive sentiment regarding the success and growth of Russia–Malaysia ties.

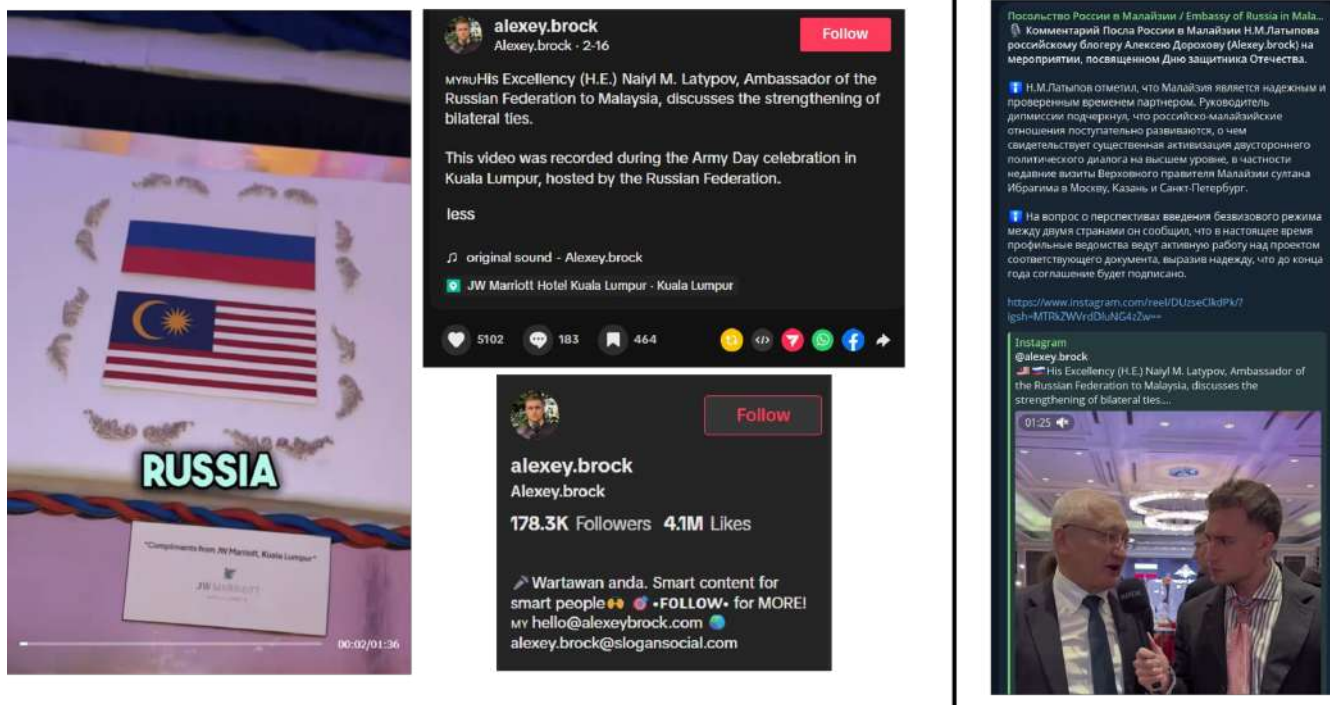


Figure 15 – Left: TikTok post by a Russian influencer in Malaysia, stressing the importance and extent of Russia–Malaysia bilateral relationship.¹³ Right: The same Instagram post, as shared on the Embassy of Russia in Malaysia’s Telegram channel.¹⁴

Although these entities might have a relatively limited reach amongst target audiences, their function as third-tier amplifiers provides another layer for continuous influence which could appeal to specific groups.

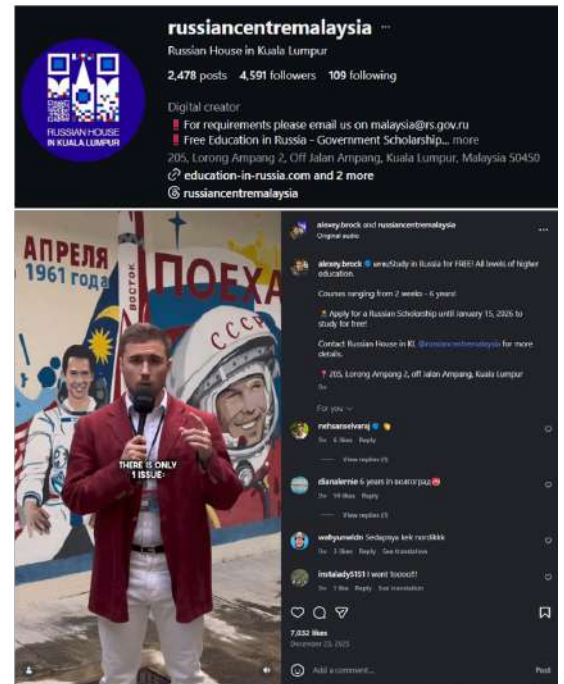
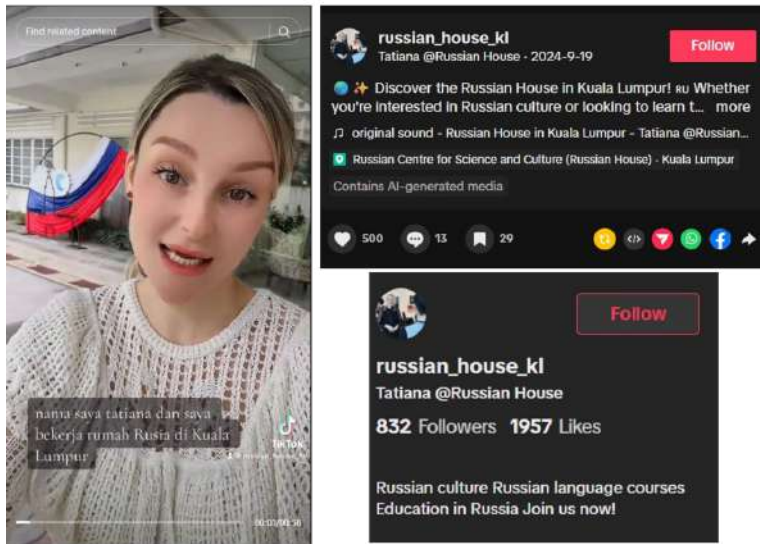


Figure 16 – Examples of content shared by The Russian House in Kuala Lumpur on TikTok (Left) and Instagram (Right), leveraging another soft power influence vector, with an emphasis on targeting younger audiences.

Undermining Relations with the West

Russian official messaging increasingly frames Malaysia’s strategic alignment as part of a broader counter-Western posture, implicitly casting the US and UK as destabilising actors in the region.

In May 2025, the Kremlin shared footage of President Putin’s press conference following Russia and Malaysia’s bilateral talks¹⁵ Putin praised Malaysia’s joining of BRICS, which he labelled as a victory for international law, sovereignty, and non-intervention. Although the United States was not explicitly named, the framing situates Malaysia–Russia cooperation within a wider coalition resisting perceived Western intervention.

The Russian Embassy in Malaysia adopts a more explicit anti-Western tone. Its messaging includes content celebrating Malaysia’s anti-colonial struggle against British rule and reposting Russian-produced material advocating a multipolar world order.

By promoting sovereignty narratives and colonial grievance, Russia contrasts its partnership with Malaysia against an “Anglo-American” axis which is portrayed as a critical risk to Malaysia’s long-term security and independence.

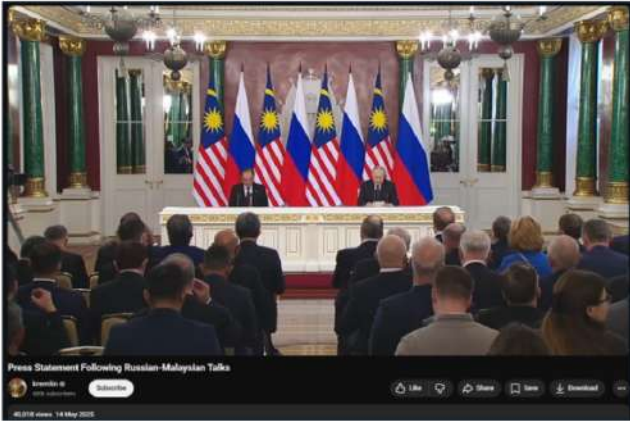


Image 1. The Kremlin’s YouTube channel shared a video of President Putin’s press conference with P.M. Anwar Ibrahim



Image 3: The Russian Embassy in Malaysia shares a video about the rise of a multipolar international community.



Image 2: Russian Embassy in Malaysia’s Facebook page posts a video praising Malaysia’s independence movement against British colonialist rule.

China-Russia Alignment

Russian campaigns targeting Malaysian audiences relay narratives promoting Russia’s alliance with China. On social media – particularly Facebook – pro-Moscow messaging amplifies anti-Western sentiment while portraying Sino-Russian cooperation as strategically stabilising in the face of US “hegemony.”

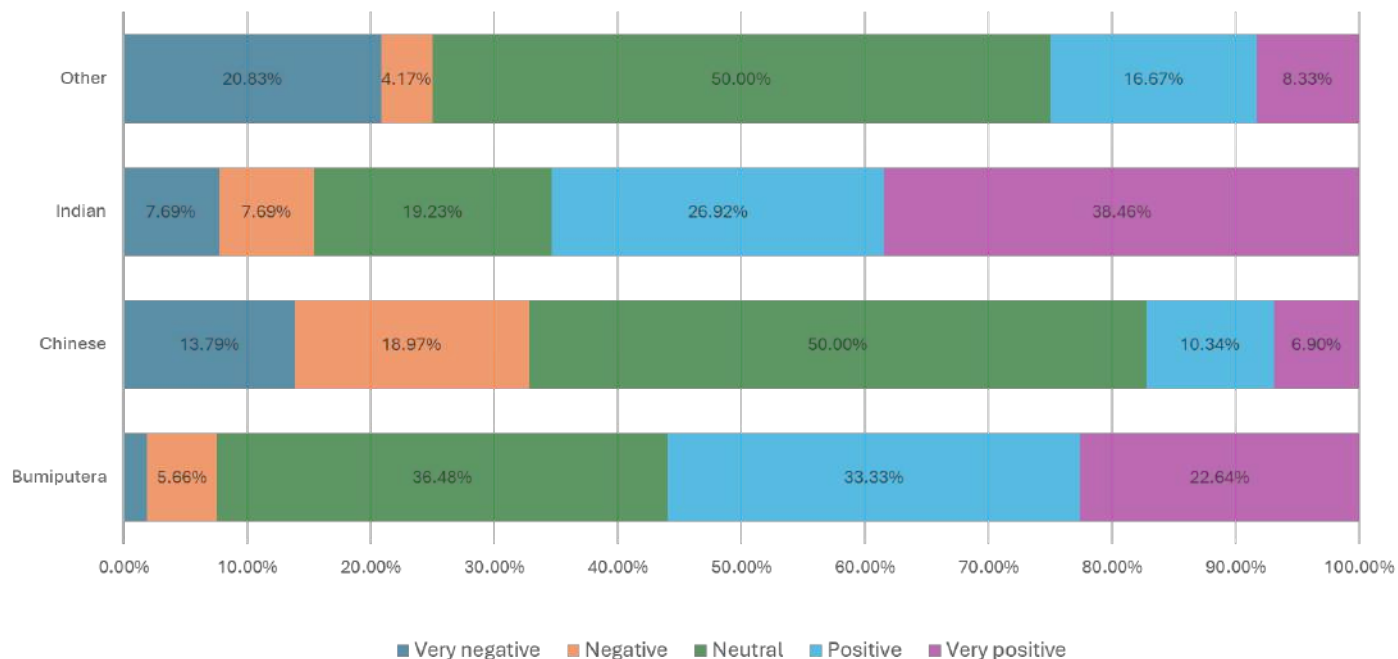
A 2024 study examining Russian propaganda directed at Chinese audiences in Malaysia found that messaging was commonly framed through a binary “US versus China” lens. Narratives often operate in tandem with pro-China content to elevate Beijing’s global standing. A minority of posts (3.8%) advanced escalatory framing, suggesting that “Taiwan could be the next Ukraine” if Western powers are left unchecked.

Content regarding China’s alliance with Russia is usually two-toned: either explicitly endorsing bilateral strategic alignment or taking the form of more subtle messaging that promotes China’s peaceful intent and disavows the US.

Survey data suggests that this messaging has managed to penetrate local perception. **The CRC survey showed 46.70% of respondents held favorable views of China’s alliance with Russia**, while 38.95% remained neutral.

Perceptions varied significantly across demographic groups. Bumiputera respondents demonstrated comparatively strong support (55.97% favourable), whereas Chinese respondents were more reserved, with 50% neutral and 32.76% unfavorable.¹⁶ Indian respondents expressed the highest levels of favorability (65.38%), while the “Other” category was more polarized, including a notable proportion expressing very negative sentiment.

CRC SURVEY: WHAT IS YOUR VIEW OF CHINA’S ALLIANCE WITH RUSSIA?



These findings suggest that narratives promoting the China–Russia alignment have secured substantial acceptance within key audiences within Malaysia’s population.

Russian Invasion of Ukraine

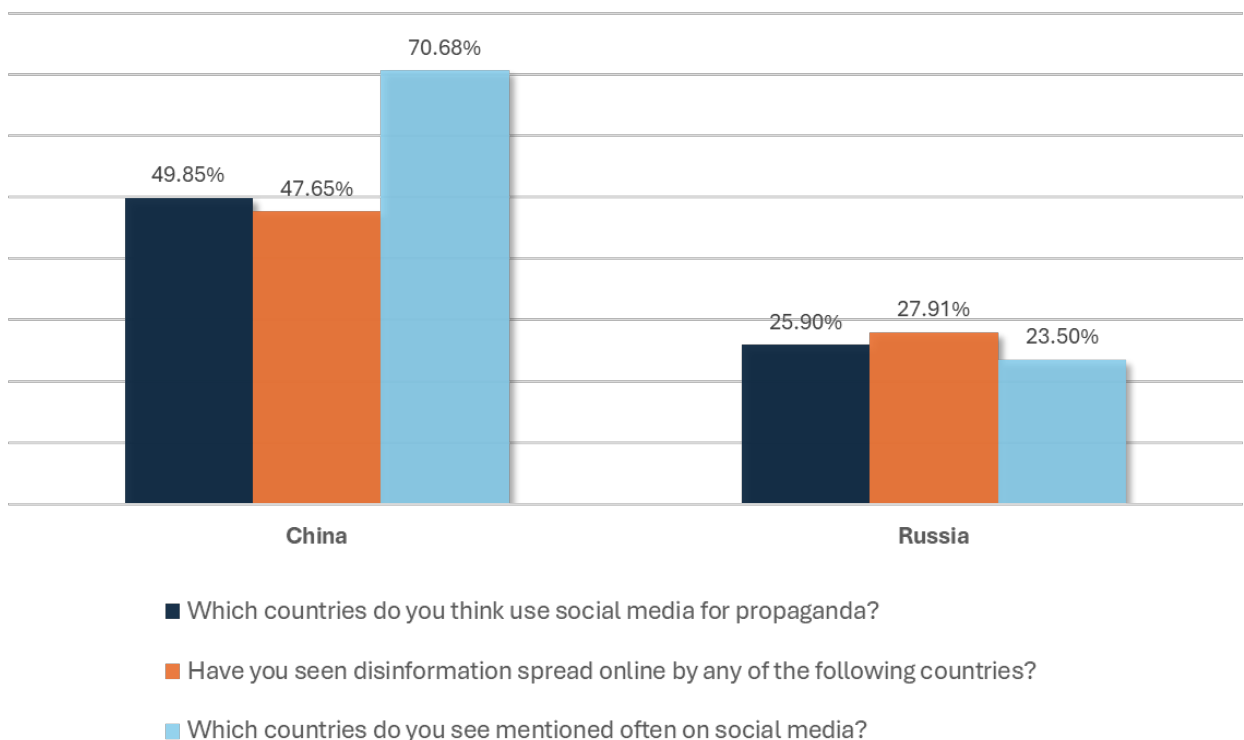
The Russian invasion of Ukraine and ongoing war constitute yet another principal vector for Russian influence activity in Malaysia. Merdeka Center’s survey data indicates that 41.6% of respondents have encountered narratives asserting that “Western states caused or continue to back the war”. At the same time, attribution of responsibility remains diffuse: only 18.1% identify Russia as primarily responsible, while 29.7% assign blame to the United States. This fragmentation might reflect effective ongoing persuasion efforts – not aimed at generating overtly pro-Russian sentiment but preventing the formation of an anti-Russian consensus.

Malaysians' Perceptions of Russia and China

The CRC survey identified pronounced ethnic variation in perceptions of foreign propaganda on social media. Among Chinese and Indian respondents, **61% perceived China as using social media for propaganda, with similar proportions reporting exposure to Chinese disinformation.** This contrasts with 46% and 42% of Bumiputera respondents, respectively.

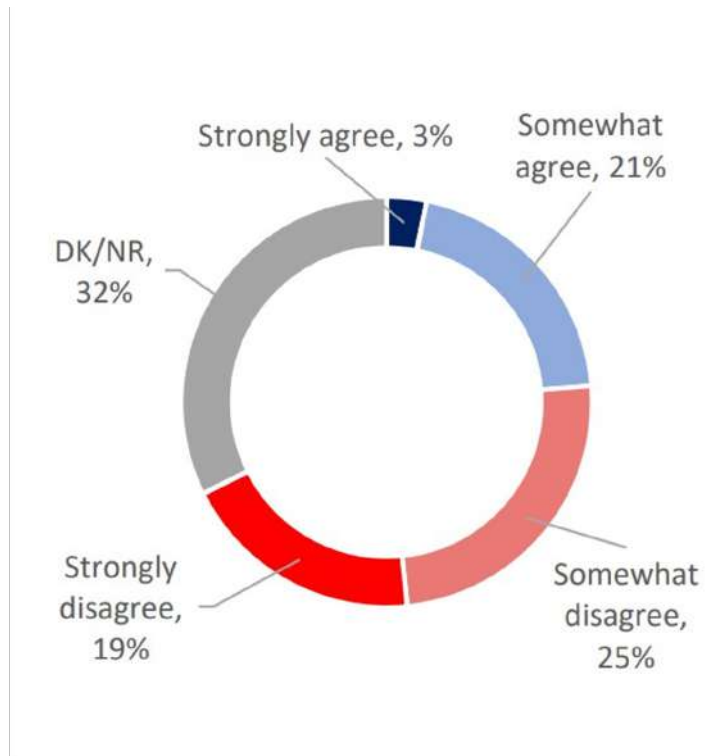
Russian disinformation was viewed as less prevalent overall, although **37.57% of Chinese and 42.86% of Indian respondents report noticing it**, compared with 22.83% of Bumiputera.

CRC Survey Respondents' Perception of Russia and China



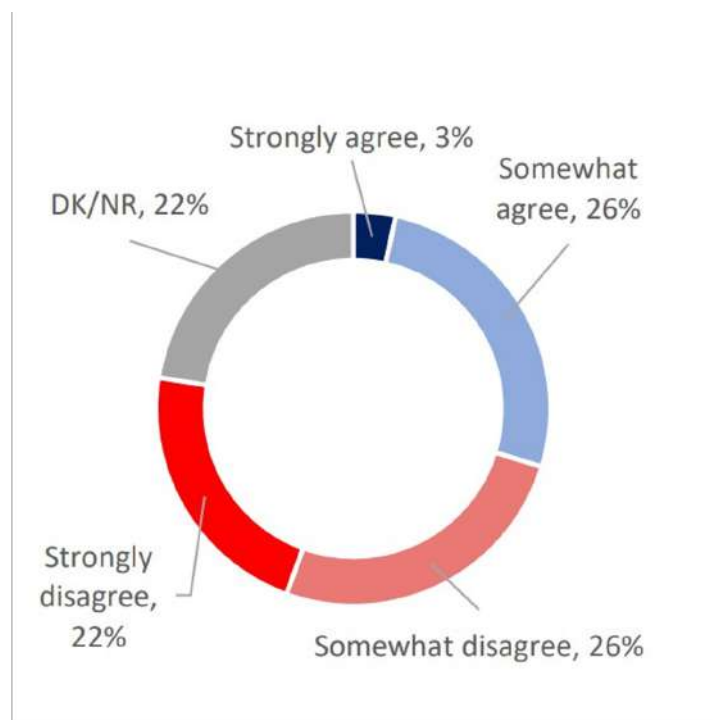
These figures suggest that ethnic affects both awareness of foreign messaging and sensitivity to disinformation. Minority respondents appear to be more exposed and more sensitive to narratives associated with Chinese and Russian influence efforts, whereas Bumiputera respondents demonstrated comparatively lower attribution to these actors and greater focus on Western influence.

Regarding Russian propaganda, Merdeka Center's survey results appear to reaffirm the CRC's previous findings when considering national averages (24% of respondents agree that Russia engages in online propaganda targeting Malaysia). However, they differ significantly when considering the reported perceptions by ethnic group, where only 10% of Chinese and 22% of Indian respondents responded positively to this question.



Q: How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements.
 Russia engages in online propaganda targeting Malaysia
 (Merdeka Center survey, 2025)

An additional data point from the Merdeka Center survey concerns perceptions of Chinese intervention in Malaysian media: **only 29% of respondents agreed that China interferes in domestic media reporting.**



Q: How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements.
 China Intervenes in Malaysian media reporting
 (Merdeka Center survey, 2025)

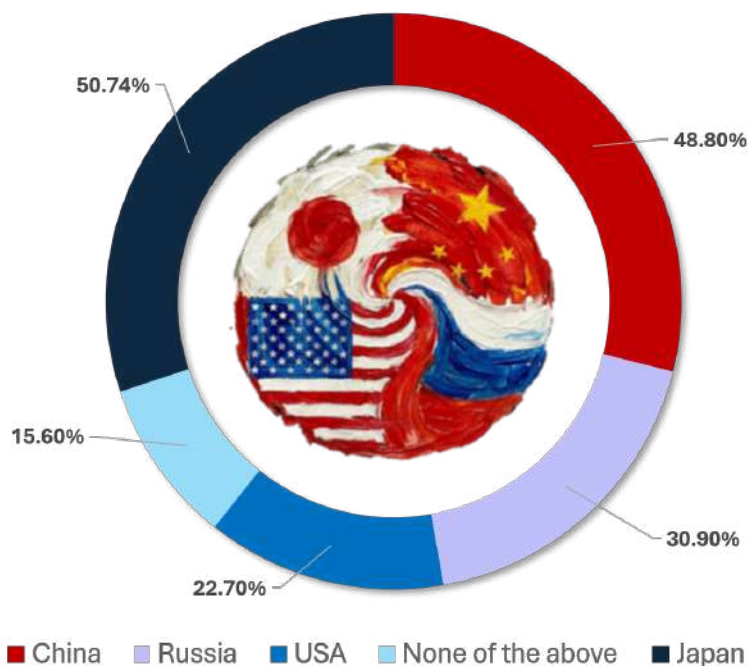
By contrast, CRC survey findings indicate higher perceived activity in the digital domain. Nearly half of Malaysian respondents believe China uses social media for propaganda, and a comparable proportion report having encountered Chinese disinformation online. However, these figures do not capture potential indirect or biased amplification of PRC narratives through Malaysian media outlets, which may occur without overt or publicly-acknowledged intervention.

Challenges to Western Cognitive Positioning

Perception of the United States vs. China

Despite its global prominence, the United States faces notable trust and alignment challenges among sections of the Malaysian population. According to the 2025 CRC survey, support for closer bilateral ties with Washington was comparatively limited across key demographic groups. Among Bumiputera respondents, only 17% expressed a desire for closer relations with the US, and just 4% believed the United States is the country that would benefit Malaysia the most. Chinese (37%) and Indian (43%) respondents were somewhat more receptive, yet even within these groups, enthusiasm for deeper US alignment was moderate rather than dominant.

CRC Survey: Which countries do you want Malaysia to be closest with?

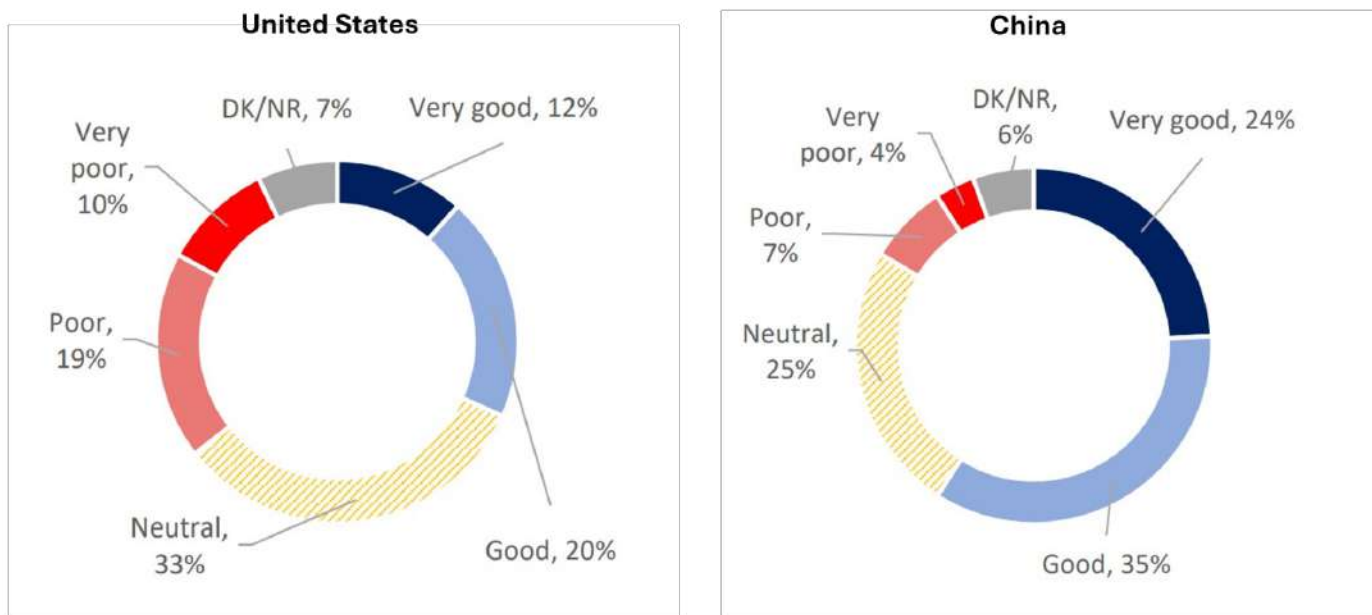


Attribution patterns reinforce this credibility gap: 28% of Bumiputera and 30% of Chinese respondents blamed the United States for tensions in the South China Sea, placing Washington close to China in perceived responsibility for regional instability.

Similarly, both surveys indicate that a substantial portion of Malaysian population tend to blame the US for the ongoing war in Ukraine: Merdeka Center's survey showed that nearly 30% of respondents consider the US responsible. According to the CRC's findings, approx. 18% of respondents believe the US is behind the war and is benefitting from it.

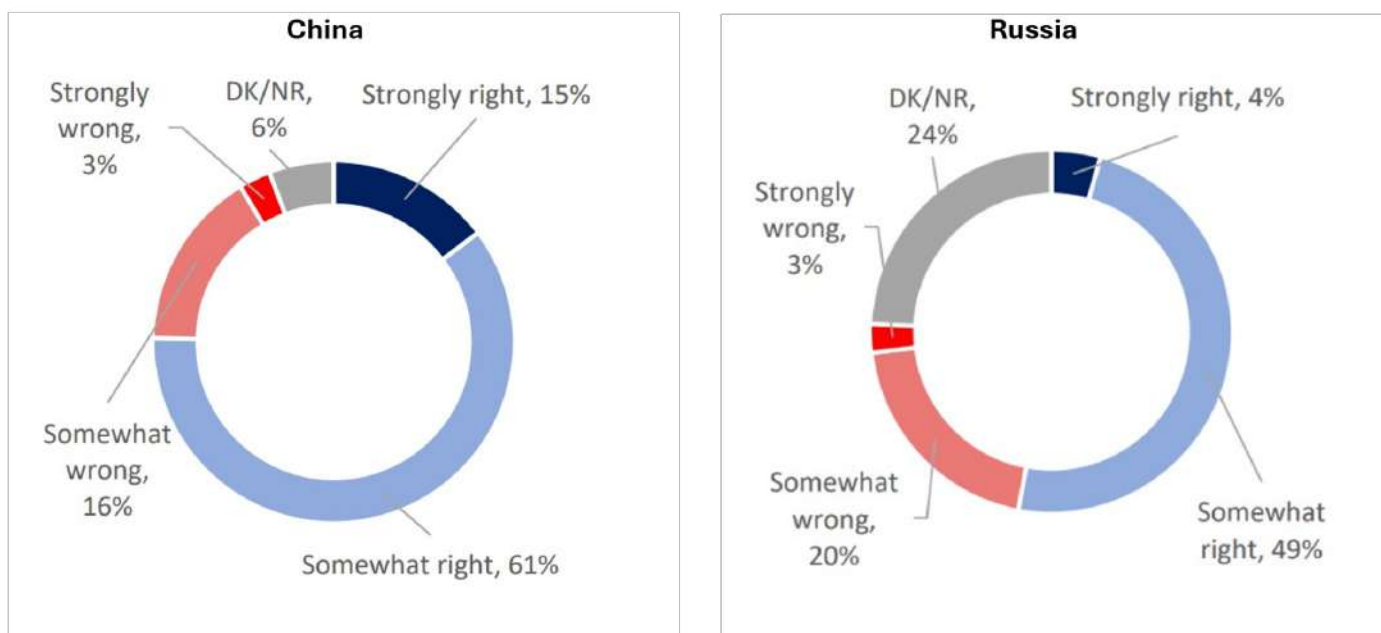
The Merdeka Center survey results have also indicated a relatively low view overall for the US. Only 32% of all respondents ranked America's performance compared to other global and regional players as either

Good (20%) or Very Good (12%). In comparison, China's overall performance rating is mostly positive, according to 59% of respondents.



Q: Thinking about each country/regional actor, please rate how you feel about its overall performance compared to other countries. (Merdeka Center survey, 2025)

Appropriately, a clear majority of Merdeka Center survey respondents (76%) believes that Malaysia's relationship with China is currently heading in the right direction.

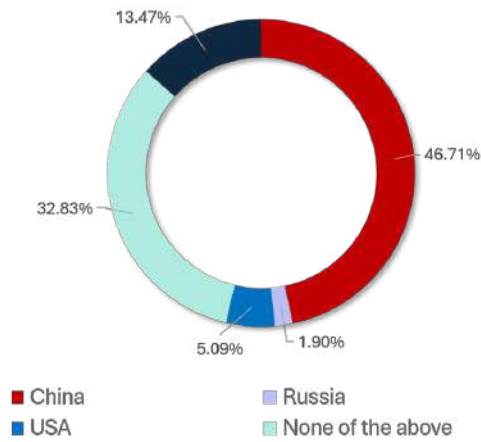


Q: In your view, do you think Malaysia's relationship with [...] is heading in the right or wrong direction? (Merdeka Center survey, 2025)

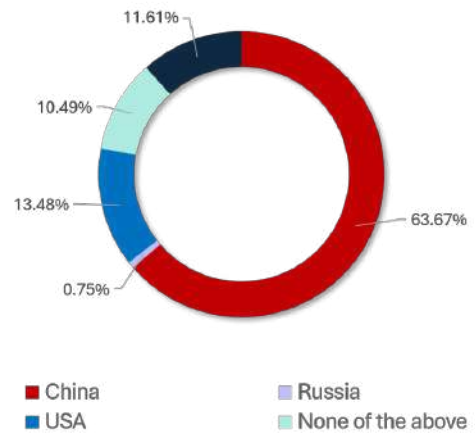
These patterns indicate that the US struggles to consolidate strategic goodwill within Malaysia's public sphere. Low support for closer ties, combined with relatively high levels of blame attribution in global disputes, points to a broader perception challenge rather than isolated policy disagreements. While recent US foreign policy positions – particularly its strong alignment with Israel – are shown to contribute

to this sentiment, the data is also consistent with sustained exposure to narrative framing that portrays the United States as interventionist, destabilising, or self-interested.

CRC Survey: Which nation helps Malaysia the most?



CRC Survey: Which country is most diplomatically active in Malaysia?



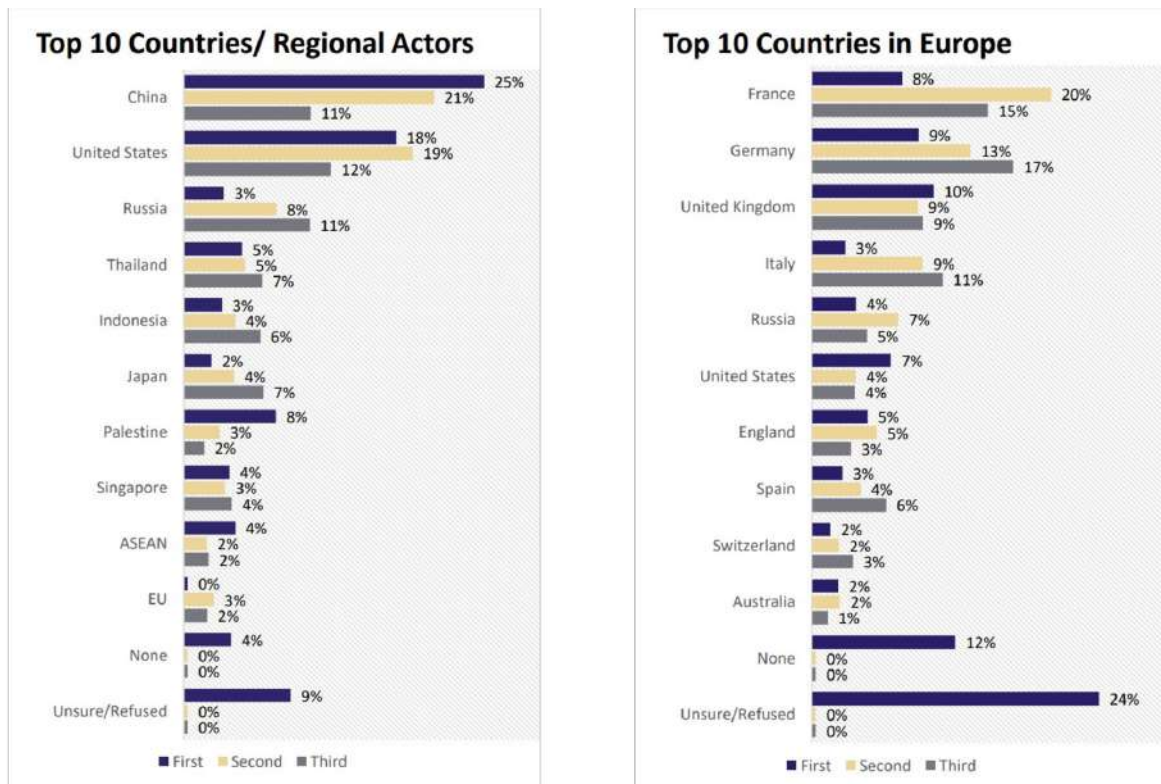
In contrast, according to the CRC's survey, respondents viewed China as a more prominent foreign policy actor, with 46.7% saying that China helps Malaysia the most.

In addition, 63.3% of respondents saw China as the most diplomatically active in Malaysia.

Taken together, the findings point to a competitive influence environment in which external narrative shaping and tangible relations affect baseline perceptions of major power conduct in the region.

Perception of European Nations and the EU

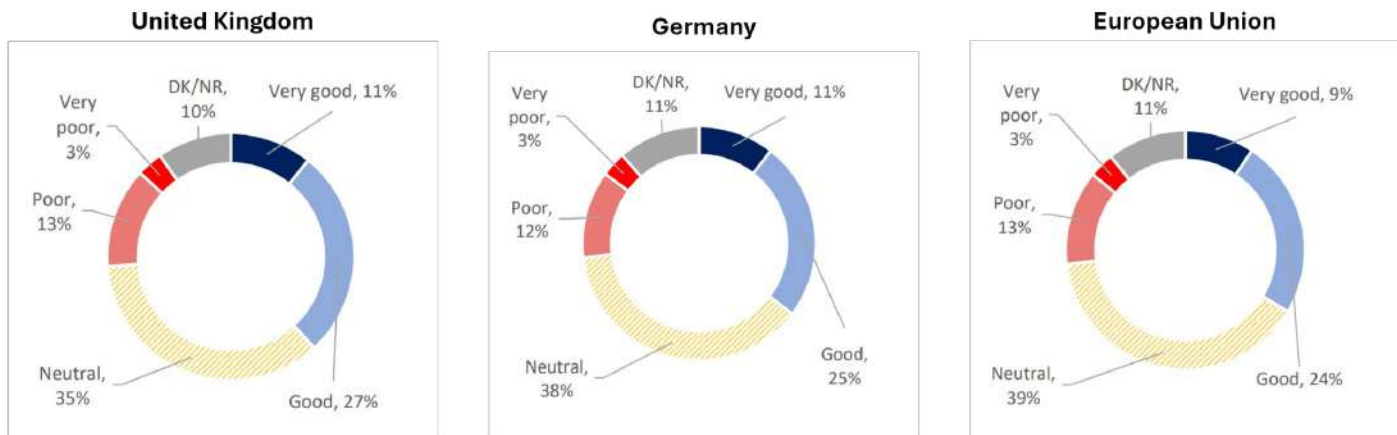
Merdeka Center’s survey findings indicate that European countries and the European Union occupy a visible but secondary position in Malaysian geopolitical perceptions. While Europe is present in public awareness, it is not as prominent as major powers or regional actors such as China, the United States or Russia.



Q16: Thinking about countries in the world, name the first three (3) countries/regional actors that comes to your mind?, for example, (ASEAN, EU, NATO) (Not Including Malaysia)

Q17: Thinking about countries in Europe, name the first three (3) countries that comes to your mind? (Merdeka Center survey, 2025)

In terms of overall performance assessments, European actors are evaluated in broadly moderate and ambivalent terms. When respondents were asked to rate each country or regional actor’s performance on a five-point scale, the proportion assigning a positive rating (“good” or “very good”) stood at 38% for the United Kingdom, 35% for Germany, and 34% for the European Union. These figures place Europe in a middle tier of perception: above clearly negative evaluations but well below the more favorable ratings accorded to China (59%) and Japan (51%). European ratings are broadly comparable to perceptions of Russia (36%) and slightly above those of the United States (32%).



Q: Thinking about each country/regional actor, please rate how you feel about its overall performance compared to other countries based on a score between 1 to 5, where 1 is "Very poor" and 5 is "very good".
(Merdeka Center survey, 2025)

This positioning suggests that Europe is neither perceived as a primary strategic actor nor as a dominant global model. Instead, it is viewed as a fairly competent but relatively distant actor. The EU in particular registers more as a technocratic or economic bloc than as a significant geopolitical power. Neutral responses are also substantial - 39% in the case of the EU - indicating limited emotional association and relatively low polarization in attitudes. Ultimately, no demographic segment demonstrates remarkable levels of endorsement, essentially relegating Europe's position to a respected but non-dominant peripheral node in most Malaysian's geopolitical mapping.

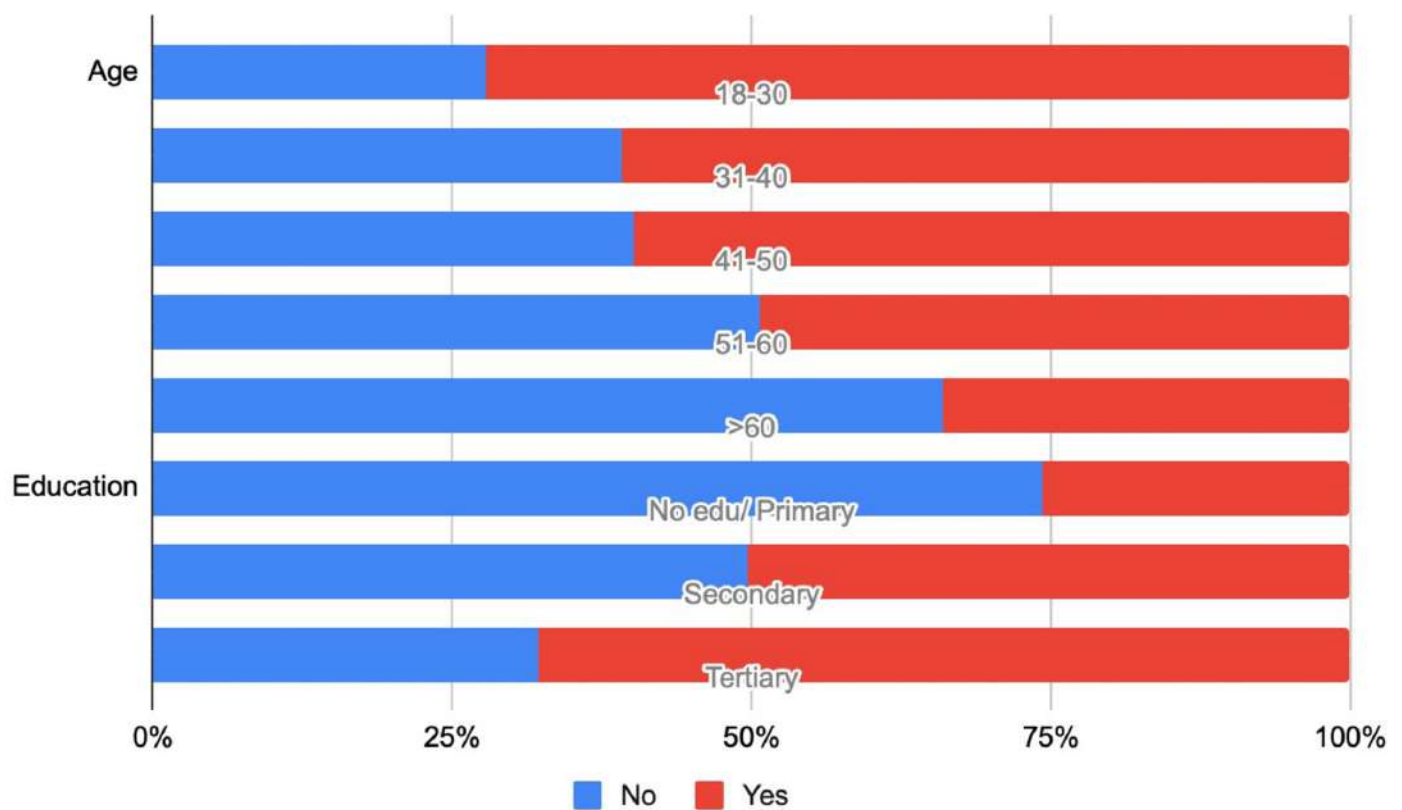
Cognitive Resilience Capacity

This section evaluates the extent to which Malaysian society demonstrates cognitive resilience capacities in the context of sustained exposure to geopolitical and authoritarian-aligned narratives.

The analysis focuses on three areas: how people verify information before sharing it, which media sources they trust, and whether these informational filtering behaviours relate both to support for governance-related narratives and to broader evaluations of major global powers. Instead of looking only at exposure to information, we should consider whether widespread circulation of geopolitical content translates into political alignment, or whether existing behavioral and trust-based filters limit persuasive influence across different demographic groups.

Behavioral Resilience

Behavioral resilience refers to the extent to which individuals apply validation practices prior to sharing information.¹⁷ While 53.4% of Merdeka Center survey's respondents report verifying information before sharing, the more important finding lies in the uneven distribution of this behavior.



Q6. When you forward the news or information that you receive, will you verify before sharing?
(MerdekaCenter survey, 2025)

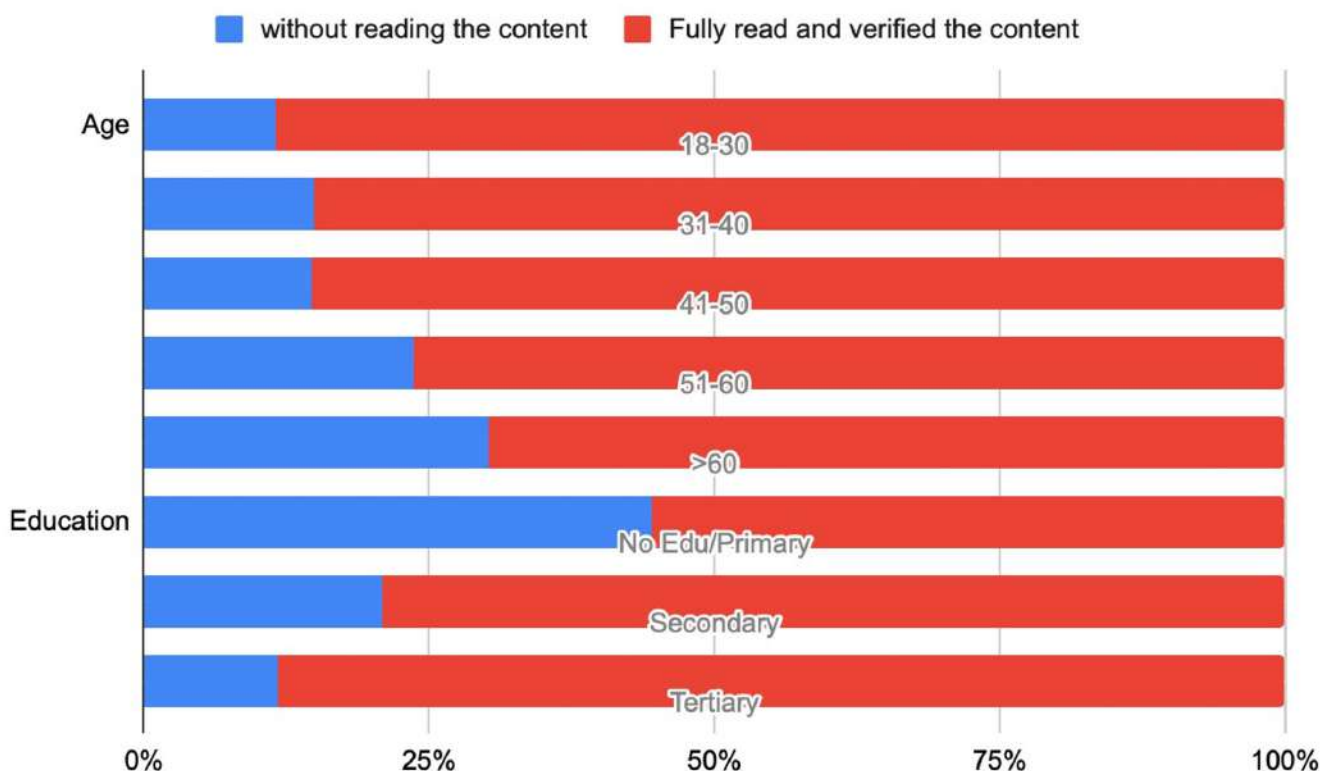
Figure 17 - Reported Verification before Sharing News, by Age and Education (%)

The data shows a pronounced demographic divide. Verification behavior declines steadily with age and increases significantly with educational attainment. The gap between respondents with no formal or primary education (22.7%) and those with tertiary education (61%) exceeds 38 percentage points. Similarly, verification drops from 68% among the youngest cohort to 30.4% among those over 60.

This pattern suggests that behavioral resilience is structurally stratified rather than broadly embedded across society. In other words, the capacity to apply basic information-checking practices appears concentrated among younger and more educated groups, while older and less formally educated segments report substantially lower levels of verification.

From a resilience perspective, this implies that vulnerability and susceptibility to information disorder are not randomly distributed. Instead, they follow identifiable demographic lines. This has practical implications: efforts to strengthen cognitive resilience cannot assume uniform behavioral capacity and may require targeted intervention across specific age and education groups.

These findings are consistent with research on digital and media literacy in Malaysia, which highlights uneven media literacy levels across demographic groups and emphasizes the importance of structured media literacy initiatives in improving the ability to evaluate and counter misleading or manipulated information.¹⁸ Broader national digital reports also show high levels of internet and social media penetration in Malaysia, underscoring the importance of digital literacy in managing online information environments.¹⁹



Q83. Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
(Merdeka Center Survey, 2025)

Figure 18 - Reported Reading and Verifying the Content of the Articles, by Age and Education (%)

Viewed through the lens of behavioral resilience, the stated content engagement practices reinforce the stratification observed in verification behavior. The tendency to share information without fully reading or reviewing it is more prevalent among older, less formally educated respondents, while younger, tertiary-educated respondents report more deliberate engagement prior to circulation.

This indicates that behavioral resilience at the point of sharing – defined as the willingness to pause, read, and assess content before dissemination – is unevenly distributed. The same demographic segments that report lower verification behavior also demonstrate higher levels of impulsive sharing.

Taken together, the findings suggest that behavioral resilience is not simply about awareness, but about consistent engagement practices vis-à-vis circulation. These practices coalesce along identifiable demographic lines, highlighting structural differences in how information is handled across society.

Media reporting assessments in Malaysia have similarly highlighted demographic differences in online information practices, particularly the vulnerability of older users to unverified content circulation and the need for targeted digital literacy interventions.²⁰

Malaysia has implemented several initiatives to promote digital literacy and responsible online behavior. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission's *Klik Dengan*²¹ program promotes safe and informed digital practices, while the national fact-checking portal²² encourages users to verify claims before forwarding them. In addition, universities and media organizations conduct workshops that teach practical skills such as checking sources and identifying misleading content.

The demographic patterns observed in this survey suggest that such efforts could be strengthened by more focused engagement with older and less formally educated groups, with an emphasis on reinforcing simple behavioral practices, such as reading content fully before sharing and verifying key credibility factors. Improving these habits at the point of sharing may help reduce authentic spread of information disorder across the entire information ecosystem.

Informational Filtering

This report adapts the concept of information filtering²³ from information science to describe the evaluative process through which individuals interpret and assess international news before forming judgments about global actors. Exposure alone does not determine influence; rather, outcomes depend on how information is processed and evaluated.²⁴ It is important because exposure alone does not determine effective influence; what matters is how information is processed and whether individuals distinguish between competing narratives rather than adopting them automatically.

Variations in informational filtering also shape degrees of susceptibility to external influence. Individuals who engage in more intensive verification and comparative evaluation may demonstrate stronger resistance to persuasive narratives, whereas those who rely on limited credibility checks or singular information channels may exhibit greater receptivity to dominant frames. In this sense, susceptibility is understood not as a fixed trait, but as a function of evaluative filtering capacity.

This subsection examines how Malaysians obtain international news and how this relates to their evaluations of major global powers.

To assess how informational filtering relates to narrative receptivity, the analysis compares agreement with the statement that China’s economic growth demonstrates the superiority of authoritarian governance across levels of multi-source verification.

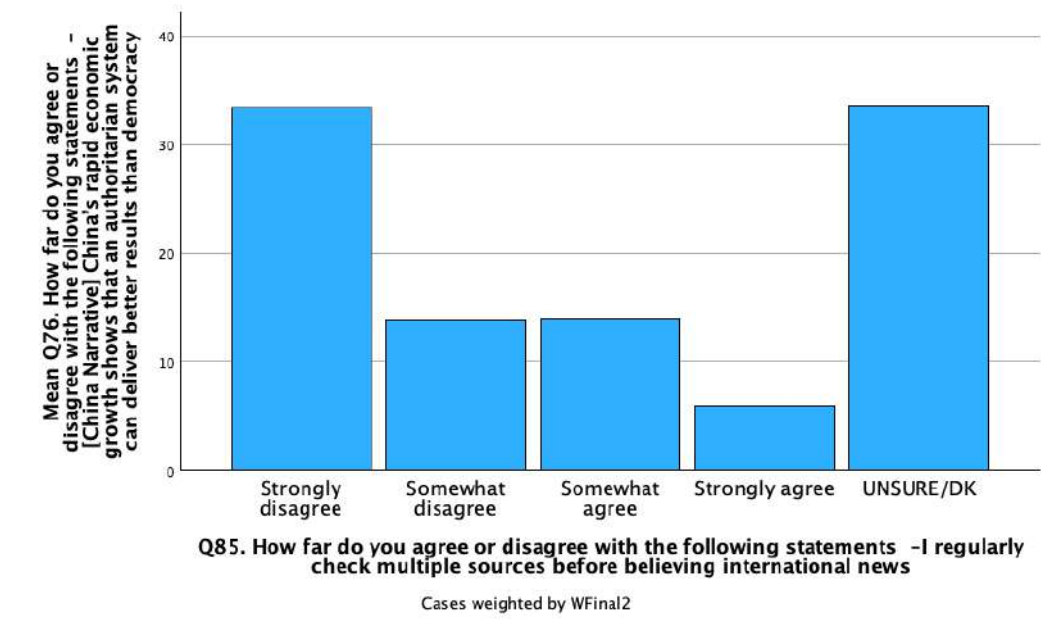


Figure 19 - Informational Filtering and Agreement with Authoritarian Performance Narratives.

The results show that agreement with the authoritarian performance claim declines as reported multi-source checking increases. Respondents who strongly agree that they regularly consult multiple sources exhibit the lowest levels of agreement with the authoritarian narrative, while those who report weaker multi-source checking demonstrate comparatively higher agreement.

This pattern suggests that proactive informational filtering may be associated with reduced receptivity to performance-based authoritarian framing. In other words, individuals who habitually consult multiple sources appear less inclined to endorse centralized governance narratives.

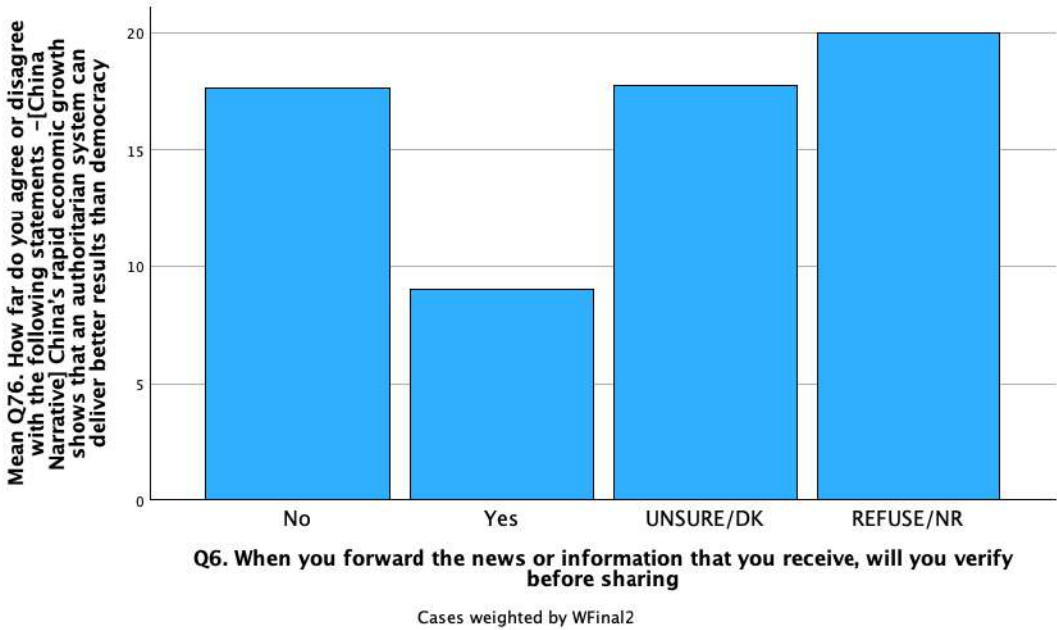


Figure 20 - Verification Before Sharing and Agreement with Authoritarian Performance Narrative.

A similar pattern emerges when examining verification before sharing information. Respondents who report verifying news before forwarding it show lower agreement with the statement that authoritarian systems deliver better results than democracy. In contrast, those who do not verify before sharing show comparatively higher agreement. This consistency reinforces the association between stronger informational filtering and reduced receptivity to authoritarian performance narratives.

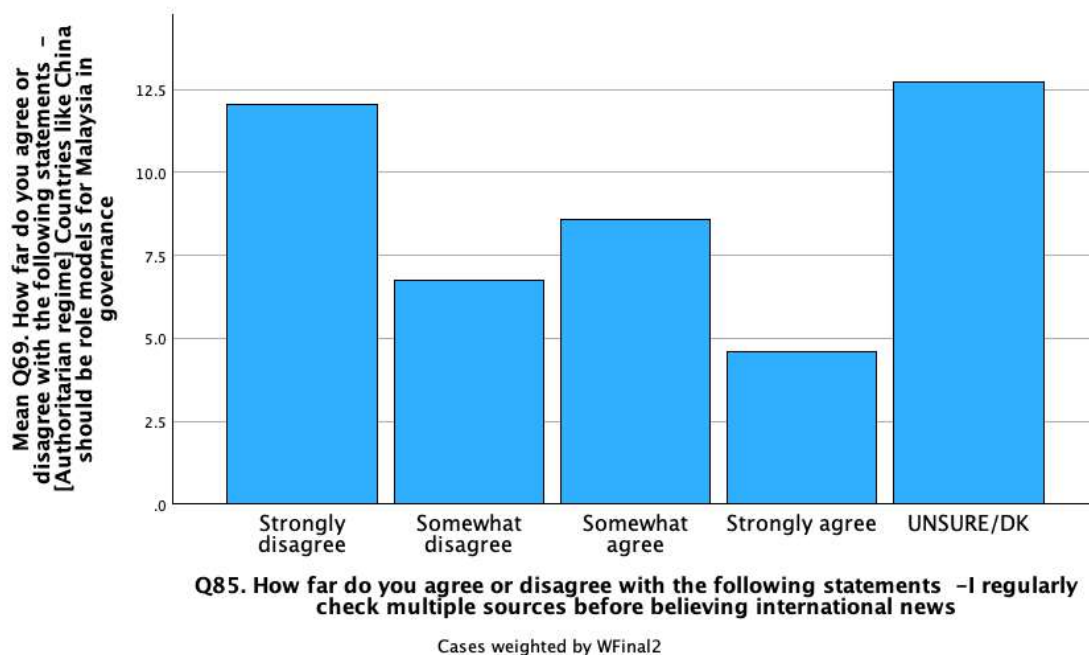


Figure 21- Multi-Source Verification and Support for China as a Governance Role Model.

The findings suggest a consistent association between informational filtering behaviors and reduced agreement with authoritarian governance narratives. Respondents who proactively verify information – either through multi-source checking or by verifying before sharing – show lower receptivity to performance-based and governance-based authoritarian claims. These associations do not establish causality. Nevertheless, they indicate that informational filtering may promote greater evaluative restraint when assessing centralized governance narratives.

This pattern is particularly relevant considering external assessments of Malaysia’s media environment. Freedom House’s 2022 *Beijing Global Media Influence*²⁵ report identifies Malaysia as exposed to sustained Chinese state media engagement and influence efforts. Yet the survey results suggest that exposure does not translate uniformly into narrative acceptance. Instead, receptivity appears differentiated by individual-level evaluative practices. Even within a media ecosystem assessed as structurally vulnerable, stronger informational filtering behaviors are associated with lower endorsement of centralized governance narratives. This points to variation in cognitive resilience within the broader influence environment.

Recent assessments by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (2025) define “cyber-enabled influence operations” as “an activity that uses digital technologies to shape, manipulate or disrupt public opinion, political processes or social cohesion; tactics include disinformation, deepfakes and hack-and-leak campaigns”.²⁶ The Cyfluence Research Center views cyber-influence threats as combining digital and cognitive threat vectors within an array of potential operational sequences, utilizing an even wider spectrum of offensive tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs).²⁷

While such assessments do not focus specifically on Malaysia, they underscore the broader strategic context in which informational environments are shaped by digitally enabled influence activities. Within this environment, individual-level evaluative practices – such as verification and multi-source checking – become increasingly significant components of cognitive resilience.

To determine whether the observed patterns are specific to China or reflect broader attitudes toward authoritarian governance claims, the analysis also examines responses related to Russia.

RUSSIA				
Question	Wrong/Distrust /Disagree (%)	Right/Trust/ Agree (%)	Unsure (%)	
Q30	22.7	52.9	24.3	Right/Wrong directions relationship Malaysia with Russia
Q31	32.2	54.8	12.9	Russia as Economic Partner with Malaysia
Q32	37	47.8	15	Russia as Security & Defense Partner with Malaysia
Q33	33.1	52	14.8	Russia as Educational Partner with Malaysia
Q34	42.7	32.9	24.2	Russia provide useful alternatives to democratic systems
Q35	31.1	38.7	30.2	Russia tolerance level

CHINA				
Question	Wrong/Distrust /Disagree (%)	Right/Trust/ Agree (%)	Unsure (%)	
Q41	18.8	75.3	5.5	Right/Wrong directions relationship Malaysia with China
Q42	21.6	75.3	3.1	China as Economic Partner with Malaysia
Q43	40.8	53.7	5.4	China as Security & Defense Partner with Malaysia
Q44	28.5	67.1	4.3	China as Educational Partner with Malaysia
Q45	47.2	38.1	14.6	China provide useful alternatives to democratic systems
Q46	42.1	37.9	19.7	China tolerance level

Figure 22- Interpreting the Russia–China Perception Matrix.

The perception matrix shows clear differences in how Malaysians evaluate China and Russia across relational, economic, security, and governance dimensions. China receives substantially higher agreement on relational and economic items, with more than 75% agreeing that the bilateral relationship is moving the right direction and that China is an important economic partner, while uncertainty remains very low.

In contrast, Russia records lower agreement on comparable items and significantly higher levels of uncertainty, particularly regarding the direction of the relationship. On security cooperation, responses are divided for both actors, with agreement and disagreement relatively close. Most notably, agreement that authoritarian systems provide a useful alternative to democratic governance remains below a majority in both cases, and disagreement exceeds agreement. The data indicates domain-specific differentiation: economic assessments are more favorable, whereas governance endorsement remains restrained and contested.

These findings are also consistent with existing analyses of Malaysia’s information environment. Loh and Mustafa (2022) identify several reasons behind pro-Russia sentiment in Malaysia,²⁸ the survey data show that endorsement of Russia’s political systems remains below majority levels, indicating that sympathetic discourse does not necessarily translate into governance support.

Taken together, the findings indicate that economic partnerships are generally viewed positively; security perceptions are mixed, and governance models are approached with caution. Although foreign narratives are present, they do not lead to uniform political alignment. Instead, respondents appear to evaluate different issues separately, supporting economic cooperation while remaining cautious about political systems.

Cognitive Security and Influence Defense

Protecting societal cohesion and the crucial assets of democracy in Malaysia requires a systematic development of cognitive resilience capabilities. Local Influence Defense capabilities must therefore evolve from reactive messaging into a proper security apparatus – equipped with dedicated methodologies, operational doctrines, and technical tooling capable of countering domestic or foreign information manipulation and interference (DIMI/FIMI), hostile influence campaigns (HICs), and sporadic narrative attacks.

Given Malaysia's threat landscape, Malaysian institutions will need to establish the capacity to detect, attribute, track, assess, and remediate information-based threats in near-real time.

This necessitates the formulation of a comprehensive Cognitive Security and Influence Defense Strategy (CSIDS) – a national-level framework defining governance structures, inter-agency coordination mechanisms, escalation protocols, and technical architectures. The CSIDS would derive and delineate roles across ministries, regulators, research institutions, civil society actors, and private-sector stakeholders.

Transitioning to the operational phase would require the establishment of a centralized Cyber-Influence Security Operations Center (CI-SOC) – a dedicated function for threat monitoring and incident response (IR) coordination. The CI-SOC should be staffed by qualified practitioners with expertise in HICs detection, threat analysis, network mapping and remediation procedures. These practitioners must also be capable of classifying coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB), synthetic propaganda, amplification patterns, and evolving attack chains.

By integrating narrative intelligence feeds with Cognitive Security Posture Management (CoSPM) solutions, defenders could gain visibility and deploy early-warning logics for distinct threat vectors.

With adequate situational awareness and structured risk assessment procedures, mitigation can follow. Immediate responses may involve the use of StratCom (e.g. targeted clarification, prebunking, or counter-framing) designed to contain narrative spread without amplifying it. Where reputational damage has already occurred, Recovery Operations (ROs) might follow to ensure narrative reclamation.

Social Media Presence as StratCom

External actors – particularly Western stakeholders seeking to reinforce pro-democratic sentiment and support for the rules-based international order in Malaysia – should adopt a structured, multi-layered StratCom posture. Influence in Malaysia's information environment is not secured through message volume alone, but through deliberate and sustained cultivation of credibility and relational continuity.

A central operational variable is Trust Capital. Both surveys conclude that a majority of Malaysians have some degree of confidence in their primary news sources, while social media remains the dominant

information gateway. This means that trust functions as valuable social currency within platform ecosystems. Actors able to reliably embed their assets within trusted digital spaces could increase their direct and indirect influence.²⁹

Therefore, Western-aligned actors should shift from sporadic messaging toward a mode of sustained digital presence. This requires the deployment and maintenance of communication channels capable of driving interaction and engagement with defined audience segments. Narrative dissemination must be calibrated – maximizing reach while securing institutional reputation.

A CRC mapping of existing social media assets (see Figure 19) indicates that European and other Western actors are well positioned within the Malaysian information ecosystem. However, these actors have not developed segmented, audience-specific channels tailored to Malaysia’s distinct linguistic and demographic strata.

By contrast, China has adopted a more targeted model. Although its official social media communication channels are limited to Facebook and TikTok, its messaging is linguistically diversified. Simultaneous information propagation in Malay, Mandarin, and English allows Beijing to target multiple ethnic groups.

This segmentation strategy enhances narrative penetration by aligning content with identity-based media consumption patterns. In order to compete effectively in Malaysia’s cognitive domain, Western actors must adopt a similar operational approach.

Embassy Social Media Followership in Malaysia

Followers per mission & platform · China Facebook combines EN, CN & BM accounts · Data Feb 2026

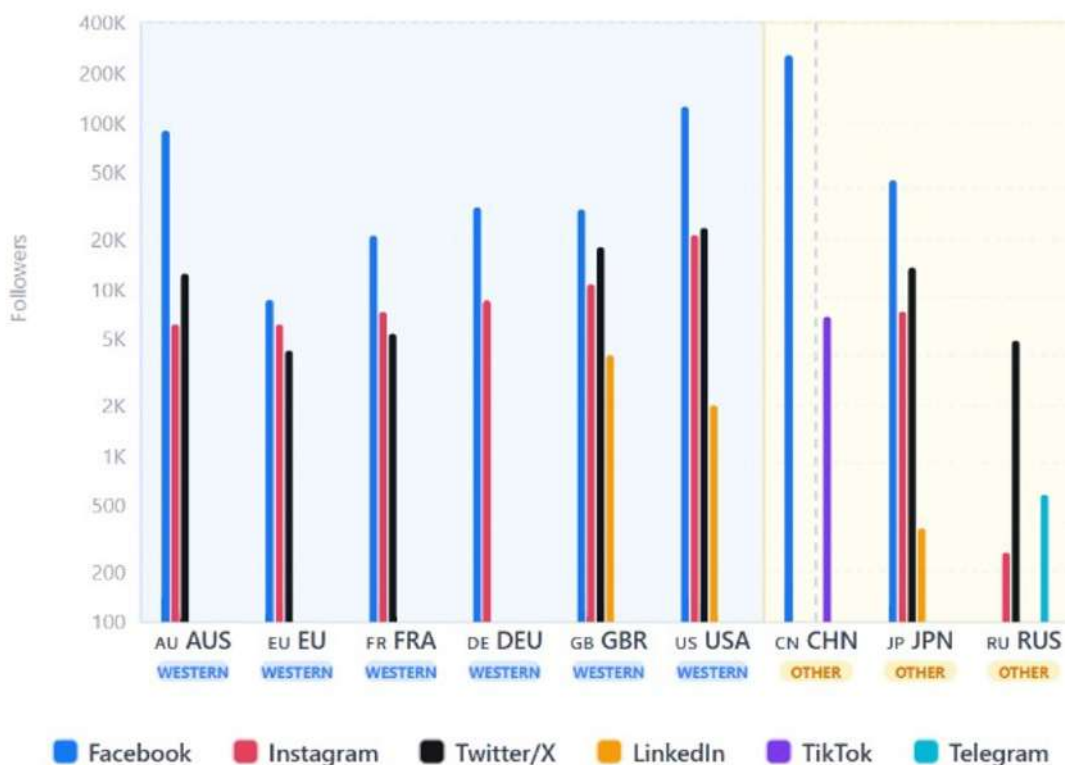


Figure 23 – CRC Mapping of Key Embassy Social Media Assets and Followership in Malaysia (scale: logarithmic). *Follower counts for Chinese Facebook accounts are combined (February 2026).

European Strategic Relevance and Positioning

Findings from both the CRC and Merdeka Center surveys indicate a complex Malaysian perception of the major global powers. While China and Russia are not viewed negatively, neither are they fully embraced. At the same time, there is clear skepticism toward US foreign policy and American regional involvement.

Recommendations

This cognitive configuration creates a strategic opening: Malaysia's public opinion environment is not polarized strictly along "West vs. East" lines but rather reflects calibrated pragmatism and selective distrust.

For European stakeholders, this presents both an opportunity and a constraint. Overt geopolitical alignment framing – in particular, messaging that appears to pressure Malaysia into choosing sides – is likely to trigger defensive reflexes. Authoritarian narratives often exploit this sentiment by portraying Western engagement as malign, interventionist, or neo-colonial. Consequently, any European strategic communications posture should avoid binary framing. Instead, it must operate within Malaysia's long-standing "hedging" doctrine.

At present, Europe is uniquely positioned to differentiate itself from both Washington and Beijing. Unlike the United States, the EU is not widely perceived as a unilateral security actor in the region. Unlike China, it is not associated with asymmetrical economic leverage or abrasive territorial claims. This enables European actors to construct a narrative centered on strategic balance, economic diversification, cultural enrichment, and rules-based stability.

Positioning Europe as a *stabilizing hedge* aligns with Malaysia's traditional foreign policy of non-alignment. If delivered correctly, European messaging can resonate with Malaysian preferences for equilibrium in great power competition.

Conclusion

Drawing from multiple sources and analyses, including the two above-mentioned recent national surveys, this report argues that while Malaysia's information environment is inherently exposed to Chinese and Russian narratives, it is not entirely compromised. Although authoritarian-aligned narratives circulate widely across Malaysian digital platforms, reaching a wide audience, ongoing exposure has not translated into ideological realignment at a critical mass.

At present, three main strategic socio-cognitive insights can be highlighted:

I. **Malaysia's cognitive vulnerability is systemic.**

- a. Social media constitutes the dominant news source across demographic groups, creating persistent exposure to foreign narratives.
- b. At the same time, self-attested moderate-to-high trust in contested primary information sources means that information disorder, when carried via trusted channels, can acquire considerable reach.
- c. Nevertheless, the Merdeka Center survey findings show that core democratic legitimacy remains intact, while admiration for authoritarian powers appears to be largely performance-based.
- d. Cognitive resilience capacity building efforts, such as intergenerational educational and media literacy programs, should focus on specific segments of the population that are more vulnerable to influence threats.

II. **FIMI efforts rely on normalization and reframing rather than brute-force persuasion.**

- a. Chinese influence prioritizes positive narratives, and leverages economic dominance, linguistic segmentation, and persistent digital presence.
- b. Overt Russian messaging is limited in scope and more crisis-dependent.
- c. Both China and Russia exploit geopolitical grievances: Amplifying cultural and religious sensitivities to drive anti-US foreign policy perceptions.
- d. Neither China nor Russia has successfully displaced Malaysia's governance model as the preferred model.

III. **Countering cyfluence threats requires strategic planning and investment.**

- a. Malaysian stakeholders should understand the Sino-Russian influence playbook in order to inform situational awareness and defensive strategies.³⁰
- b. Cyfluence Defense must be institutionalized. Malaysia requires a structured and coherent counter-cyfluence framework, which may be inspired by the blueprint of NATO's operational conduct in Europe.³¹

- c. Strategic preparedness includes pre-emptive cognitive resilience capacity,³² ongoing intelligence sharing, strategic communications asset deployment, and acquisition of advanced analytical capabilities (e.g. narrative mapping, TTPs identification and auto-remediation/recovery).³³
- d. A centralized Cyber-Influence Security Operations Center (CI-SOC) will provide a framework for long-term cognitive security. Its core functions would include implementing countermeasures against hostile influence operations and coordinating with relevant stakeholders across public and private infrastructure – such as ministerial strategic communications units, government agencies, and, where appropriate, a National CERT in response to cyfluence threats. The scope and executive mandate of this taskforce should be defined and governed by legal frameworks and regulatory guardrails to mitigate the risk of overreach or abuse of authority.

For European stakeholders, the objective should not be to compete in overt rhetorical escalation nor to pressure Malaysians into any “bloc” alignment. Europe has a comparative advantage in the form of its current position and historical reputation.

For Malaysian policymakers, the primary long-term risks do not stem from externally induced information disorder alone, but from potential internal rifts and erosion of trust, that could in turn create receptivity to “strong leadership” framing and authoritarian sentiment.

Lastly, Malaysia’s information ecosystem reflects a resilient yet exposed open society, with numerous attack surfaces which could be potentially exploited by malicious threat actors. It is likely that FIMI efforts targeting Malaysia will continue to persist and evolve, following global trends, such as the integration of GenAI and Agentic AI into cyfluence kill chains.³⁴ In order to address these threats, both Malaysian and European stakeholders will need to collaborate and adapt their strategic and operational frameworks.

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29. In this context, ‘**operational assets**’ refers to both authentic and synthetic entities (e.g., individuals, organizations, or movements) as well as domains used in a coordinated manner as part of an influence operation, in order to disseminate selected narratives. Accordingly, ‘**digital spaces**’ refers to various platforms and mediums (e.g. social media platforms, online news outlets, forums) that can be leveraged to host operational assets’ activity and facilitate foreign influence efforts.
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31. For reference, see: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. “Countering Information Influence Operations in the Nordic-Baltic Region.” 22 January 2026. Available at: <https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfjs/?file=/publications/download/Countering-IIOs-in-the-Nordic-Baltic-FINAL-FILE.pdf>
32. Pre-emptive cognitive resilience capacity refers to a society’s ability to anticipate, recognize, and withstand information disorder and cognitive threats. Examples include media literacy programs aimed at susceptible target audiences, disinformation awareness training, and endpoint-based fact-checking tools.
33. Advanced analytical capabilities refer to security solutions that integrate real-time narrative intelligence with structured threat classification aligned to established tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) frameworks. These technological solutions enable the automated execution of remediation actions in accordance with defined defensive playbooks, thus scaling defensive capacity and facilitating effective incident response (IR).
34. The integration of GenAI and agentic AI in cyber-enabled influence operations allows threat actors to generate and spread large volumes of AI slop or even high-quality synthetic content (deep-fakes). Recent reports have suggested that sophisticated threat actors have incorporated autonomous AI agents into attack-chain planning and execution. This means that crucial operational phases including preliminary reconnaissance, operational infrastructure setup, and coordinated narrative proliferation and amplification now require minimal human intervention. As this emerging threat develops, we expect additional threat actors to acquire comprehensive AI-driven offensive capabilities, greatly increasing both the scope and impact of cyfluence threats.
For additional information, see: Cyfluence Research Center. “Anthropic’s AI Report and Its Implications for Cyfluence and Hostile Influence Operations.” 9 December 2025. Available at: <https://www.cyfluence-research.org/post/anthropic-s-ai-report-and-its-implications-for-cyfluence-and-hostile-influence-operations-hic>



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